

Legislative Assembly of Alberta

Title: Monday, April 16, 2007

1:00 p.m.

Date: 07/04/16

[The Speaker in the chair]

head:

Prayers

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Let us pray. Guide us all in our deliberations and debate that we may determine courses of action which will be to the enduring benefit of our province of Alberta and its people. Amen.

Hon. members and ladies and gentlemen, I'm now going to invite Mr. Paul Lorieau to lead us in the singing of our national anthem, and I would invite all to participate in the language of one's choice.

Hon. Members:

O Canada, our home and native land!
True patriot love in all thy sons command.
With glowing hearts we see thee rise,
The True North strong and free!
From far and wide, O Canada,
We stand on guard for thee.
God keep our land glorious and free!
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.
O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Lorieau, for again whipping us all up with that high level of enthusiasm. One year ago we remembered what you did. Sorry that we're down to this provincial Assembly today.

Please be seated.

head:

Introduction of Guests

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I have three introductions today. The first will be a number of students from Mundare. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Legislature 18 visitors from Mundare. They're, of course, accompanied today by their teacher, Andrew Yeo, and Miss Theresa Nelsen. They're seated in the members' gallery, and I would ask them to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

My second introduction. I wish to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly 61 guests from Tofield school. They are accompanied today by teacher Mr. Fred Yachimec, who, if you look at the *Hansard*, has of course been bringing students year in and year out; Mr. Gilles Daigle; student teacher Megan Tooke – I got a chance to meet her today – teacher's assistant Mrs. Glenda Metro; and parent helpers Mrs. Kathleen Perrott and Mrs. Cathy Armstrong. A tremendous group of students, a large group from Tofield. We wish them well and ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly. It's a great, great way to start the week, Mr. Speaker.

My third introduction today. I'm happy to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly Mr. Ed Perlik, Mrs. Helen Zahoda, and Roman and Lorraine Perlik. These special guests are the grandparents and great-aunt and great-uncle respectively of Robyn Peters, one of our hard-working pages. They have come here to watch Robyn in action in the Legislature. I've had the pleasure of knowing Ed for many years. Wonderful to have him and his family in the House, both in the gallery and, of course, on the floor. Something very interesting: Ed has said that the last time he was here, he was here with his social studies class in 1945. I would ask them all to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to members of the Assembly 39 guests from my constituency of Edmonton-Whitemud. Students from the Brander Gardens elementary school are here with us again, as they are every year. I've got to tell you that they did not disappoint with their questions again this year. I find grade 6 students have the best and the hardest questions, and as I say, I was not disappointed again this year by the quality of the questions that they raised.

They are accompanied today by Mme Natalie Gago-Esteves, who has been with us at least, I think, seven years in a row now for me; Miss Alissa Sept; teacher's aide Mrs. Rita Adams; student teacher Mrs. Sabrina Haque; and parent Mrs. Susan Thompson. Of special note, my special assistant Sean Yam was a student at Brander elementary school and had Mrs. Natalie Gago-Esteves as a teacher. He remembers her as being a passionate educator, and he remembers her fondly. He was very pleased to be able to be reunited today when we were taking pictures. I'd like to ask all of the students and the adult accompaniment to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of our Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm just delighted to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly a really delightful woman that it's been my great pleasure to work with over the past couple of years. Cheryl Williams is graduating now from the U of A with a bachelor of arts in the history of art, design, and visual culture. She worked in my constituency office in the summer of 2005, and then she came back to volunteer in the office through this last school year, from September of '06 through until now. She will be returning to the U of A in 2008 to pursue a master of arts in the history of Alberta mountain culture. She's really been a fun, creative, committed woman to work with. I'd like you to please join me in welcoming her. With her today is my fabulous constituency manager, Sarah Crummy. Sarah serves me and the people of Edmonton-Centre with great, good humour and compassion and efficiency. Please welcome them all.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure today to introduce to you and through you to the members of the Assembly Cyndi Deloyer, executive director of Fort McMurray Family Crisis Society. I'd like to ask Cyndi to rise and please receive the warm and traditional welcome of the Assembly.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to introduce to you and through you to this Assembly three individuals on strike at the Palace Casino. They are Elaine French, Kristina Ratkovic, and Sharlene Pattison. These workers are here on day 220 of this strike, which could have been averted if there were fair labour laws in place to protect Alberta workers. Instead, they are here today to bring attention to their workplace situation after more than seven months on the picket line. Elaine French has been working in the slots department of the Palace Casino for the past three years. Sharlene Pattison is a bartender at the Palace Casino and has been there four years. Sharlene hails from B.C. and came to Edmonton

in search of work, as many people do across Canada. Kristina Ratkovic has been at the Palace Casino since 2005 and is a server. They're joined today by UFCW local 401 representative Christine McMeckan. I would now ask that they rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of this Assembly.

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to rise today to introduce to you and through you to all members of the Assembly representatives of the child care sector. The Alberta Child Care Network Association provides a forum for sharing information between the child care community and government. It endorses and promotes quality child care on behalf of children and families, supports early childhood training and education, and promotes public awareness and education about child care. Earlier today I announced a new 1 and a half million dollar bursary that will help child care providers attract and retain staff and help staff in preschool and out of school child care programs to continue their education.

As well as helping to support and attract staff, the bursary program will enhance the sector's capacity in dealing with operational challenges. The Alberta Child Care Network Association was a tremendous help in the development of the bursary program. The association will be responsible for developing eligibility criteria, accepting and assessing application forms, and distributing funding to successful applicants. Their great work and dedication to the child care industry is a valuable contribution to the future of Alberta's children.

I now ask the following members of the Alberta Child Care Network to rise and receive the traditional warm welcome of the Assembly: Diane McKean, Traudi Kelm, Susan Elson, Deirdre Leighton, and Dr. Sherrill Brown, and accompanying them, I see Lynn Jerchel from Children's Services. Please join me in thanking them and welcoming them.

head: 1:10

Members' Statements

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

National Soil Conservation Week

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This week, April 15 to 21, is National Soil Conservation Week. Having worked the land as a farmer myself, I'm proud to note that Albertans are leaders in conserving our land and our soil. In fact, we're the only province to have legislation specifically designed to protect this important resource. However, it's what our producers are doing in the field every single day that really demonstrates how Albertans are dedicated to conserving our soil for future generations. Our farmers and growers are using what we call beneficial management practices to combine productivity with conservation. For example, nearly two-thirds of our province's cropland is now being direct-seeded to reduce soil erosion and improve the richness of our soil, making it more fertile and moist. Soil conservation also supports rangeland and woodlot production and is important in maintaining other resources such as water, air, and wildlife habitat.

Mr. Speaker, advancing our knowledge will be key to further improvements. Fortunately, Alberta already has a comprehensive soil monitoring program. This program is unique to North America and possibly world-wide because our 45 monitoring sites fully represent the various topography of our agricultural landscape. For 10 consecutive years we've been able to track and assess changes and the cumulative effects that agriculture management has had on our soil. Additionally, this program will help examine other agricultural and soil-related activities, including the implication and impact of climate change. Furthermore, by sharing the data from

these sites with academic institutions across Canada, we're providing valuable learning opportunities for students.

Mr. Speaker, the success of our agricultural sector, food quality, and a healthy environment are all connected to soil conservation. As we recognize April 15 to 21 as National Soil Conservation Week, it's important that we also acknowledge and thank our producers for being leaders in the agricultural industry and faithful stewards of the land.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

Yom ha-Shoah, Holocaust Memorial Day

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Today marks a very important day: Holocaust Memorial Day, or Yom ha-Shoah. I invite the Legislature and all Albertans to take a moment of reflection as we remember the price the world paid as a result of the senseless and systematic persecution of 6 million people of the Jewish faith during the Second World War. In the words of Pastor Martin Niemöller:

First they came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Finally, they came for me . . . but there was no one left to speak up.

Yom ha-Shoah reminds the world of the atrocities of the Holocaust as well as the massacre of millions of others during acts of genocide throughout history, Mr. Speaker. Every day we must be vigilant in our defence of human rights. I urge all Albertans to actively promote acceptance of all people and to protect the rights which uphold the way of life in this province.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Volunteerism

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. From April 15 to 21 we will be recognizing the contribution volunteers make to the welfare of our province. This year's theme is Volunteers Grow Community. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the volunteers on behalf of our caucus and, indeed, everyone in the Legislature. Alberta Liberals place a high value on volunteers' time and effort.

Volunteers donate their time in agencies that provide critical services to the residents of Alberta: youth, family, social support, recreational activities, safety, education, wellness, disease support, to name a few, and many others which contribute to the improvement of Albertans' quality of life, like arts and culture.

Many of these organizations are contracted by the government to provide essential services to the citizens of Alberta. They perform these services with repressively small budgets, spending a great deal of their human resources, paid and volunteer, on fundraising to subsidize the government funding of those very services. Few are in a financial position to react to any hardship or emergency that they may encounter.

Rising utility costs and the decreased availability of office space are huge concerns. Recruiting and retaining qualified staff without being able to offer competitive salaries is leading to higher turnover rates, which is often catastrophic for organizations that operate with few paid staff. It is critical that voluntary organizations get the financial support they need to provide the services Albertans require.

Running a voluntary-based organization is not free. These volunteers deserve our admiration and our thanks, but they also

deserve reasonable funding support for their organizations.
Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Ford World Men's Curling Championship

Mr. Zwozdesky: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, it's my pleasure to acknowledge the 2007 Ford World Men's Curling Championship that was held last week right here in Edmonton at Rexall Place and was attended by our Premier, our minister responsible for sports from Dunvegan-Central Peace, myself, and others. The success of this great event resulted because of many outstanding individuals, beginning with an extraordinary host committee that included president Jackie-Rae Greening, Bonnie Lopushinsky, Ron McGowan, Kris Sakowsky, Tracy Telford, Terry Symyrozum, Katherine Huising, our Northlands Park liaison Leanne Smoliak, and many other volunteers who worked tirelessly in preparing for these special games.

It was great to watch an international tournament that involved teams from Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Scotland, Switzerland, the U.S.A., and for the first time the crowd-pleasers and heart-stealers, Korea. Congratulations go to our winning gold medallists from Ontario, skipped by Glenn Howard, to the silver medallists from Germany, skipped by Andy Kapp, and to the bronze medallists from the U.S.A., skipped by Todd Birr.

Additional thanks go out to the sponsors of the 2007 Ford World Men's Curling Championship and to the many businesses from Edmonton and elsewhere in Alberta that contributed.

Our final thanks must go out once again to the people of Edmonton and area, who demonstrated that our capital city is truly a world-class host. This championship set a world record for participation, with more than 10,000 spectators taking in last Sunday's final, thus bringing the total attendance for the nine days to a remarkable 184,970 spectators, a record for any Ford-sponsored event and a world record for a men's-only curling event.

Thank you and congratulations to all the volunteers, the sponsors, the fans, and the athletes who worked so hard to ensure the success of this international curling event.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Sustainability of Social Programs

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. I understand that a majority of businesses that go under in the first two years fail not because of market or management but due to undercapitalization, and in a different realm I understand that most of the public and not-for-profit social programs that fail do so because of a lack of political will to see them through to a point of sustainability. What I want to do today, Mr. Speaker, is create an awareness of the crisis of human capital. We've kept these overlapping truths in separate compartments of our minds, and it's time to bring them together.

We have a province that excels globally in the raising of financial capital and is undercapitalized in the social and human domains. I'm referring not only to our cash investment in these areas but to the attitudes that shape our priorities. For years we have talked of people as human resources, resources we have not renewed, have allowed to burn out and be depleted. We have provided minimal support to those who chose to go into nurturing professions: teaching, nursing, caregiving, and social work. We have considered these soft career choices in comparison to those who work with

hardware, heavy equipment, and finance. At best we applaud their choices with a bland, "That's nice." At worst we put them on the chopping block for budget cuts and clawbacks.

1:20

Mr. Speaker, we need to bring undercapitalization here into balance with our overinvestment in the oil sands and construction industries, in the words of the hon. Premier, to deal with the pressures created by economic growth. We will do this not only by providing sustainable funding to these areas but by restoring a sense of responsibility for each other, the belief that we are our brothers' and sisters' keepers.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Camrose Kodiaks Hockey Team

Mr. Johnson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to congratulate the Camrose Kodiaks, the new Alberta champions of the 16-team Alberta Junior Hockey League. Last night the Kodiaks defeated the Fort Saskatchewan Traders in the sixth game of a seven-game series in front of a capacity hometown crowd at the Max McLean Arena. The 2007 championship is a nice 10-year anniversary celebration for the Kodiaks and their owners, the Camrose Sport Development Society.

In their 10-year history the Kodiaks have won four Alberta Junior Hockey League championships out of six times in the final playoff series, three B.C./Alberta Doyle Cup wins, national junior hockey silver medals in 2003 and 2005, and the Royal Bank national junior hockey championship in 2001.

The Kodiaks now advance to the Alberta/B.C. championship and if successful will represent our two provinces in the Royal Bank Canadian championship to be held in Prince George, British Columbia, in May.

Nostalgia was also in the air last night. The Kodiaks played their last game of Alberta junior league hockey in the Max McLean Arena and will move into the new 3,000-seat Camrose sport development centre next year, and the Fort Saskatchewan Traders played their last game as a Fort Saskatchewan team as they are moving to St. Albert next year. They are to be congratulated for a long history in Fort Saskatchewan and especially for their silver medals this year.

I want to congratulate the Kodiaks, the players and their coaches – Boris Rybalka, Doug Fleck, and Miles Walsh – the management and their owners, the Camrose Sport Development Society, on another very successful year. I ask all members to warmly congratulate the Kodiaks, and I wish them all the best on the road to the national championships.

Calendar of Special Events

The Speaker: Hon. members, three days were mentioned already today in the Assembly: Holocaust Memorial Day, Yom ha-Shoah, yesterday; National Volunteer Week, April 15 to 21; and National Soil Conservation Week, April 15 to 21.

There are a number of other weeks and days that I'll just draw to all members' attention. April 16 to April 22 is International Astronomy Week. April 17 is World Hemophilia Day. April 17 is Equality Day in Canada. April 20 to April 22 is Global Youth Service Day. April 21 is Law Day. April 21 is also International Astronomy Day. Earth Day is April 22.

Administrative Professionals Week is April 22 to April 28 as is National Immunization Awareness Week as is National Medical Laboratory Professionals Week as is National Organ and Tissue

Donor Awareness Week. April 22 to May 24 is National Physiotherapy Month. April 23 is St. George's Day as it is World Book and Copyright Day as it is part of Global Action Week, which goes from April 23 to April 29. April 23 to April 29 is also Global Road Safety Week. April 25 is Administrative Professionals Day. April 26 is World Intellectual Property Day. April 28 is National Day of Mourning. April 29 is International Dance Day, and April 29 to May 5 is Education Week.

head: **Presenting Petitions**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Rev. Abbott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to present a petition of 73 names, signatures, and addresses of constituents of Drayton Valley-Calmar and area who are urging the government to introduce a bill to create a buffer zone of at least one mile from any major water body and thus prohibit approvals of confined feeding operations within this buffer zone to "protect and preserve Alberta's fresh water sources."

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to table another 78 signatures from Albertans from all over the place but particularly from Edmonton, Gibbons, and St. Albert urging the government to ensure that the remuneration paid to employees working with people with disabilities is even across the sector and to ensure that they're fairly compensated to be able to retain them, to also improve their access to professional development opportunities, and to "introduce province-wide service and outcomes-focused level-of-care standards."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tabling Returns and Reports**

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table today for the information of the Legislative Assembly three letters. As chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee I wrote on March 22, 2007, to both Ms Sheila Weatherill, president and chief executive officer of Capital health, and Mr. Jack Davis, president and chief executive officer of the Calgary health region, to attend a Public Accounts meeting to be held on Wednesday, September 12, 2007. I would like to table these two letters.

I would like to table a response that I was delighted to receive on March 29, 2007, from the Calgary regional health authority indicating acknowledgement of the letter from March 22, and it states in here that the committee can expect to see the Calgary regional health authority in September. To date we have not heard from the Capital health authority, and I anxiously await that letter.

The Speaker: Calgary-Mountain View.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have the appropriate number of copies of a letter representing the Marie Lake protection society expressing grave concerns about the development in the Marie Lake area.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to table a report called A Crisis of Human Capital, talking about the issue of human capital in the children's services sector.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Manning.

Mr. Backs: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to rise and present some letters on behalf of constituents in Edmonton-Manning calling on this Legislative Assembly to support that the accused killer of Joshua John Hunt be sentenced and tried as an adult "due to the nature of this crime, his past criminal history and that he is so close to the age of 18 years."

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-McClung.

Mr. Elsalhy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today I rise to table the requisite number of copies of two sheets of paper submitted by Mr. Ted Klimosko, who describes himself as one of those Albertans hurt by the Alberta advantage and one who is ready to leave the province. The first document shows a purchase contract for a condo unit clearly showing him having bought the unit, that it was his basically. The second document shows that clause titled Closing and Completion Date, which states that should the seller not be able to complete the unit, they can just simply refund the money and take possession back and they can sell it to someone else. He thinks that this is not only an inconvenience, but the fact is that he lost money. He agrees that this province needs a consumer advocate.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my privilege today to table the prerequisite copies of four annual reports: the report of the Alberta Association of Registered Occupational Therapists for 2005-2006, the Public Health Appeal Board for 2006, the Alberta College of Social Workers for 2006, and the College of Dental Technologists of Alberta for 2005-2006.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Rutherford.

Mr. R. Miller: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have two tablings this afternoon, the first being a letter dated March 30 from a constituent, Azra Ahmad, a new immigrant to Canada from Bangladesh, a single parent, who discusses her difficulty in finding and maintaining affordable housing for herself and her nine-year-old son.

The second, Mr. Speaker, comes as a result of myself attending with several colleagues from this Legislature the labour appreciation night on Saturday evening at the Shaw Conference Centre at which the Jim Shewchuk award was presented. I'm pleased to table the appropriate number of copies of the Shewchuk award program outlining this year's winner, Maureen Werlin, a member of the Canadian professional employees international union who has spent the previous 17 years working with the Alberta Federation of Labour and has done an awful lot, in fact an absolutely impressive amount of work with the Edmonton Epilepsy Association.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

head: **Tablings to the Clerk**

The Clerk: I wish to advise the House that the following documents were deposited with the office of the Clerk. On behalf of the hon. Mr. Knight, Minister of Energy, a document entitled Royalty Review 2006: List of Consultant Studies and Software.

head: 1:30

Oral Question Period

The Speaker: First Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Regional Municipal Planning and Development

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The social, environmental, and economic challenges facing Alberta's communities do not respect municipal boundaries. Take Strathcona county: a wall of new upgraders on one side, a potential 100 square mile coal strip mine on another, and the proposal for the continent's largest landfill, taking trainloads of out-of-province garbage, on another side. Yet the people of Strathcona county have little to no say in these developments because they're in different counties. To the Premier: will the Premier admit that the people of Strathcona county should have a right to be heard on the future direction of development in this region?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are processes in place when various developers are putting forward proposals for development in municipalities, and adjoining municipalities also have an opportunity to comment on applications that are made. But this is one area that we recognize as a priority for the government, and that is land-use planning, better co-operation, better communication amongst and between municipalities, and we're getting on with the job.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The city of Edmonton provides many services for residents outside its boundaries, from transportation and recreation to social services. The city of Edmonton bears additional costs because it's the hub of this region. Edmonton's development is directly impacted by decisions of other municipalities. For example, land targeted for a hospital in Strathcona county could conflict with land that is proposed for heavy industry development in Edmonton. To the Premier: what is this government prepared to do to fix regional planning so that Edmonton and its neighbours can work together on future growth?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, when I served in two previous capacities, as minister of infrastructure and minister of transportation, I worked with the 22 municipalities in putting together long-term transportation plans. That has really moved this whole area very positively in terms of some major construction of large, very important roadways to us, to the whole area. We're continuing to work on other areas in terms of further development in the province, in the capital region, and how we can co-operate further. Although as elected officials every person has their own opinions, which they bring to the meeting, they are working in a very positive direction.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The lack of requirements for municipalities to plan on a regional basis has led to conflicts between neighbouring municipalities across the province. The Alberta Capital Region Alliance is just one example of regional planning that has broken down, leaving the future of the Edmonton region in question. To the Premier: is it still fundamentally the position of this government that regional planning is hands off, or will the Premier consider supporting a forthcoming Alberta Liberal bill that will make regional planning mandatory?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before in the House, we're a little further ahead of where the Liberals are in this particular

area. The minister responsible for municipal affairs will be coming forward with the kinds of discussions he's had with the municipal leaders finally after – what? – five years of discussion. All AUMA, AAMD and C, and the two big city mayors have agreed on the municipal sustainability report. That report is being vetted through the various processes, and there will be further information to follow.

The Speaker: Second Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Openness and Transparency in Government

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. On what is perhaps the biggest single issue this government will face, the review of the royalty regime, this government flat out stumbles. It appointed someone with a multimillion dollar conflict of interest, a former VP of Shell Canada, to the panel. To the Premier. The head of Shell Canada has written to the Premier explaining that the current royalty framework provides Albertans with a, quote, fair return to the province's natural resources. End quote. What assurances beyond some vague oath can the Premier provide that the views of Shell Canada, which opposes any changes to royalties, are not being embedded in the panel and this government by the panel member who still has a multimillion dollar stake in that company?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, with respect to the administrative portion I'll ask the minister to respond.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Oberg: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would let the Legislative Assembly know that prior to the attendance of any meeting Mr. Sam Spanglet, who sits on this committee, sold his shares, sold his stock options in Shell Canada.

Dr. Taft: Well done. Well done.

The Premier's lobbyist bill, which is a belated half-step full of loopholes, defines a lobbyist as someone paid to do their work, yet we had an individual appointed to this panel who is clearly in a conflict of interest. Will the Premier admit that there is nothing preventing this kind of incident from occurring again under the lobbying bill that he is proposing?

The Speaker: Well, the Lobbyists Act is currently before a committee of the House. All hon. members have ample opportunity to participate then as part of the debate. Perhaps the hon. leader will proceed to the third aspect of this question.

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we brought forward the patronage contracts awarded to defeated Tory MLA Bob Maskell, the Premier claimed it was a problem of perception, stating that "under my leadership perception of this sort will not happen." However, the appointment of this individual to the Royalty Review Panel raises serious problems of perception. From cabinet selection to leadership fundraising to the Balzac deal to the Vegreville health crisis the Premier explains it all away by saying that it's not what it looks to be. To the Premier: does the Premier agree that these issues are serious issues of perception that should not have been allowed to develop under his government?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I said last week in the House and the week before that this government has moved further than any other

government in terms of openness and transparency. When I say openness and transparency, I mean it. When the issues were raised last week in the House with respect to a contract by a previous member, an MLA, there were some questions raised, and I'll make sure that we conduct a full internal audit of the billings and make that information public.

The Speaker: Third Official Opposition main question. The hon. Leader of the Official Opposition.

Affordable Housing

Dr. Taft: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There's a crisis in Alberta right now. Many Albertans cannot afford a home. The Alberta Liberals have a basic principle when it comes to housing: everyone needs a home. Many Albertans are facing massive rental increases that are forcing them out of their homes. This is affecting seniors, low-income and middle-income earners, students, people on AISH. It's a crisis, but this government is failing to act. To the Premier: will this government immediately bring in a one-year rent increase regulation as the Alberta Liberal housing policy recommends in order to protect renters?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker . . . [interjections]

The Speaker: The hon. Premier has been recognized.

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I think there's a disagreement on the other side of the House in terms of whose idea it is.

All I know is that the minister responsible for housing is moving the report through the process. We will be announcing recommendations with respect to the report, asking, of course, not only the federal government and the municipalities to work closer together with the private sector, including the province of Alberta.

Dr. Taft: Well, massive rent spikes are just one symptom of the housing problems facing Albertans. In addition, condominium conversions are seriously eroding the available supply of rental units. Some landlords want to convert their apartments to condominiums with no regard for the renters who cannot afford a condominium. This practice is putting people out on the street with no place to go. Again to the Premier: will the Premier take the advice offered in the Alberta Liberal affordable housing policy and declare a two-year moratorium on condo conversions, except for those from developers who will replace lost rentals with new units?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this question was raised, of course, on a policy issue by the third party, I believe by the leader of the third party. We said that those recommendations, through the question that the hon. leader raised, will be some of the discussions that we will have around the caucus table to build the recommendations and options in terms of the very critical area with respect to housing.

Mr. Speaker, yes, there is an issue in terms of available housing. But, you know, more and more Canadians outside of Alberta insist on moving to the province because it's the only province where jobs are available, and that's why they're coming here.

1:40

Dr. Taft: One of the impediments facing renters is that even if they find a home they can afford, they do not have the financial means for the damage deposit and first month's rent. This initial cash outlay is a big impediment to the working homeless and to low-income people in search of affordable homes. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: will this government follow the lead of the

Alberta Liberal affordable housing strategy and implement a microcredit for low-income earners to cover the cost of the security deposit and first month's rent? Everybody needs a home.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to reaffirm that the housing task force has made a report, and we are looking at that report. Some of the issues are because of the growth factor that is involved in this province. Those are some of the challenges: making sure that people that move to Alberta or that people that are looking for their first home or that are able to rent have that opportunity.

The Speaker: The hon. leader of the third party, followed by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Emergency Hospital Services

Mr. Mason: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Uncontrolled growth and this government's long history of terrible planning are creating problems across the province, from housing to long-term care to the environment, but the crisis that hits closest to home for most Albertans is our health care system. A report being considered today by Edmonton city council shows that ambulance red alerts in Edmonton were 15 times higher in February 2007 than they were just one year earlier. Just to be clear: a red alert means there are no ambulances. So if you have a heart attack or a car accident, there's no ambulance. My question is to the Premier. What is he going to do, and what is he going to tell those Edmontonians and other people in Alberta who don't have an ambulance when they need one?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the minister of health has of course taken steps in this particular area, and I'll ask him to answer.

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe a red alert actually is when there's a lack of capacity at the emergency rather than a lack of ambulance to respond. But I can tell the House that I've met with both the Capital health authority and the Calgary regional health authority on the issue of emergency wait times and the wait time of ambulances at emergency, and both of those major regional health authorities are moving to put in place matters to deal with them. In the Capital region they've put in place the full-capacity protocol, which is not an answer in itself, but it's a good interim step.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The minister is trying to take credit for the full-capacity protocol, which was developed by the health region, when he should be taking the blame for this government's lack of planning and investment in our health care system. When will this minister accept responsibility for the ongoing crisis in our health care system as evidenced by the increased emergency room wait times and rampant red alerts?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm not trying to take credit for the full-capacity protocol. In fact, the credit for the full-capacity protocol goes to the emergency doctors themselves. Dr. Raj Sherman, who is head of the emergency doctors, was talking to

the health authorities and to people in government about the implementation of that. Thankfully, Capital health authority agreed early in February to start implementing it, and it's already showing promising results.

With respect to taking responsibility for the other issues in health, of course that's my job each and every day.

The Speaker: The hon. leader.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. Well, maybe less talk and more action would be in order.

There has been a steady increase in the number of precious minutes paramedics spend waiting to transfer their patients. It's gone from 45 minutes a year ago to 63 minutes on average so far this year. That 18 minutes can literally be a lifetime for someone waiting for a paramedic. What action is this Premier taking to get acute care and emergency room capacity caught up after years of population growth and Conservative neglect?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of new beds coming on stream. There's a considerable amount of reinvestment in infrastructure. That's on the expenditure side. But it's about time we also looked at how we can reduce the number of visits to emergency rooms, and that is reducing the number of vehicle collisions in this province, ensuring that Albertans live a much healthier lifestyle, don't get involved in those situations – of course, these incidents come forward with people on ATVs. We just lost another young person the other day. All of these contribute to the many visits to emergency. So, yes, spend more money, but see how we can reduce the number of visits as well through more responsibility.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Cardston-Taber-Warner Constituency Issues

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Municipal governments are struggling more and more each day with the fiscal imbalance in funding and regulations, that make it costly and impractical to do what is needed. I would like to address three constituents' problems today. First, the town of Taber needs a new water treatment plant. They have applied to CAMRIF for funding. No news, though. They have tenders out that are due in May, but without funding and the approval of the government they are hooped, and there will be a delay and a likely cost for taxpayers in Taber. To the Premier: will this government commit to working with Taber to resolve the problem before the end of May?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, coming forward on Thursday, of course, will be our budget. That will outline the plan for the year in terms of infrastructure, both water and sewage treatment, critical infrastructure to municipalities. We are facing those issues in terms of capacity to find people to build all of the infrastructure that's necessary, but in this particular program that the hon. member mentioned, it's a federal/provincial program, so both levels of government have to agree on that particular project.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: They need an answer, though, to deal with the tenders.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The border village of Coutts has been fenced off. This is a huge economic barrier for the town. We don't

even have a fence like this for our border between much of Canada and the U.S. Travellers are forced to walk over eight minutes versus one minute the old way and sometimes in minus 40 weather. This fence should not have been built in the first place, and now this government hides behind safety regulations and says that it's not safe for adults to cross the road in a 20-kilometre-an-hour speed zone. All they have been asking for is a crosswalk and a gate. Two more years of studies and excuses are unacceptable to the people of Coutts and their visitors. To this Premier: what is this government going to do to address this problem now?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, I believe the hon. member is referring to a joint federal/provincial project on the border crossing. I know that there were some issues in terms of the planning. That was a few years ago. I remember that file a bit, but it was a safety issue. It's also an issue that we're negotiating with the federal government on because they're responsible for the border crossing, but we'll check into it and get back to the hon. member.

Mr. Hinman: Mr. Speaker, the crosswalk and the gate are provincial.

For the last 30 years the Snake River ranch east of Cardston has been fighting a losing battle with the St. Mary River as this government has adopted the policy that a pound of cure is better than ounce of prevention. Last fall the transportation department was finally prepared to do something about the washing out of the bridge and the road, only to be stopped by the DFO and Alberta Environment, and it continues to be a problem being bounced back and forth between federal and provincial. Will this government act now and save this road, the bridge, and the family's connection to the world before the next flood?

Mr. Stelmach: Back to the first question, Mr. Speaker. Even though part of the funding was provincial, the overall development, the planning, was both federal and provincial.

With respect to this issue this is something that we face, the Snake River, on a regular basis. There are actually two federal environmental authorities. One is the Department of Fisheries and Oceans and, of course, under navigable waters as well. So you always have to work with two authorities. Quite frankly, Mr. Speaker, even to replace a simple culvert on a country road – and that happened in your constituency – you know how long it took for us to get approval. We're working with the federal government to try to expedite it.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Hays.

Women's Shelters

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Second-stage housing is essential to ensure that women and children fleeing domestic abuse have somewhere to go after the immediate crisis has passed. Despite this fact, the government has no clear funding program for second-stage housing in Alberta. Money announced for women's shelters last week is greatly needed and appreciated but will not address this particular issue. To the Minister of Children's Services: when will the government commit to providing ongoing and sustainable funding for second-stage housing across Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can tell the House that the women's shelter report was publicly released last week and is

available to everyone on the website. A couple of days ago I met for several hours with women's shelters stakeholders to go through the recommendations. I am happy to note – and I'm glad, actually, that the hon. member brought this up – that one of the recommendations is that government work with community partners to “develop affordable and transitional housing” as well as “conduct a cross jurisdictional analysis to assess the costs and effectiveness.” Clearly, second-stage housing was a huge part of our discussions and certainly something that we'll be looking at immediately.

Thank you.

1:50

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Research suggests that for every crisis bed available, two to three second-stage transitional beds are needed, yet in Alberta this number is reversed. Statistics show that while there are 692 crisis beds available to those in need, there are only 297 second-stage beds. To the Minister of Children's Services: why has the government failed to address the shortage of second-stage beds in this province despite their great importance in disrupting the cycle of abuse?

Ms Tarchuk: Well, Mr. Speaker, I'd say again from our discussions last week that second-stage housing is a priority and is something that we will be looking at. I will be moving forward with stakeholders on this issue.

Mrs. Mather: In my constituency of Edmonton-Mill Woods and across Alberta the shortage of affordable housing is critical. It was recently reported that 75 per cent of women who returned to abusive partners after receiving services cited lack of affordable housing as the main reason, a 50 per cent increase from 2005. It is clear that affordable housing is a crucial part of any strategy to address family violence. To the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing: when will this government take action to ensure that women and children affected by domestic violence can find the affordable housing they need?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Danyluk: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As we have said previously, we acknowledge the concern over affordable housing in Alberta. We are presently going through the process. I do believe that the budget is in three days.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Hays, followed by the hon. Member for St. Albert.

Land-use Development Framework

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We're hearing a lot these days about land and water pressures. These pressures are continuing after a number of years of increased activity on the land. We've also heard about plans for developing a land-use framework to deal with those activities. My question is to the Premier. What is the status of the land-use development framework?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, the land-use development framework agreement has of course been mandated to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. The consultations have begun. This is going to be a task which is going to require a fair amount of consultation, as we heard today in the House, in terms of the differences amongst municipalities, competing interests of forestry,

agriculture, urban sprawl. We're going to work very diligently in this area because a good land-use agreement is good for the province of Alberta. There are 3.3 million people in Alberta today. What is this province going to look like with 4 million people in a number of years?

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. What is the land-use framework intended to do?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Dr. Morton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The work already done on the land-use framework has given us the vision of the framework: the principles and the desired outcomes. It's a good starting point. Going forward, this framework will develop an overarching policy structure. It will give provincial-level guidance to land-use planning and management. This framework will give us the approach that we can use to balance the competing and multiple uses that occur on both private and public lands. I believe that the framework will address a number of different issues, including regional planning. There's a certain overlap there with the minister of municipal affairs to facilitate greater co-operation and co-ordination between towns and cities. It'll address the issue of Crown lands and also private lands.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Johnston: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: Alberta has an extensive set of regulations already in place, so why do we need a land-use framework now?

Dr. Morton: It's true, Mr. Speaker, that our land-use management process in the past has served us well. But times have changed. We have to update it to reflect the new economic realities of Alberta. That reality is one of hypergrowth both in the economy and our population. It is putting unprecedented pressure on our lands, both public and private. You often see competing demands on the same piece of land for agriculture, forestry, oil and gas and industrial development, housing, recreation, and conservation. We have to rationalize those activities on the land. I expect that the land-use framework will ensure that the quality of life that we enjoy today will be there for generations to come.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs.

School Infrastructure in Calgary

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While the Minister of Education sows P3 seeds across the province, schools are falling apart in Calgary. Last week the roof of Ernest Manning high school proved that it was no match for the spring thaw, and now repairs to the gym floor are at risk. Will this government commit to providing enough funding to ensure that students in this school will not have to skip basketball games, dodge buckets, or even change schools to accommodate this government's inadequate financial support? Mr. Minister, help us, please.

Mr. Liepert: Mr. Speaker, last year in the budget the provincial government increased the funding for infrastructure and maintenance from \$48 million annually to \$200 million, a fourfold increase. That

allowed the Calgary board of education – and I happened to meet with the Calgary board of education on Friday – to fix some 49 roofs of schools in Calgary. We recognize that there's still more to be done, and that's why we're bringing a budget forward later this week.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Ernest Manning is one of the many schools in the Calgary public system that has a roof in serious need of repair or even replacement. Marlborough school just got its students back to class a month ago, a year after it was closed due to fears that the roof could collapse. Mr. Minister, how many schools have to reach a crisis before the government provides the level of funding needed to protect Alberta's investment in our schools across the province?

Mr. Liepert: Well, Mr. Speaker, appropriately so, we provide the funds to school boards, and school boards have their priorities as to what they spend their funds on. The Ernest Manning roof is due to be fixed this summer, so there will be funds for that school. It's on the list to be repaired this summer.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Comments made by some of the members opposite suggest that the government is happy to blame school boards and even individual administrators for problems created by years of underfunding and neglect. The reality is that the Calgary board of education's \$466 million deferred maintenance backlog makes it very difficult to respond to emerging maintenance problems. Will this government stop giving school boards a starvation diet and start providing the money needed to keep our Alberta schools structurally sound and able to equip students to go to school?

Mr. Liepert: I'll repeat once more: we increased the funding for infrastructure and maintenance fourfold in last year's budget. We have a budget coming this week that will deal with infrastructure and maintenance.

One of the things that this government is looking at is some alternative ways of financing schools. One of those alternative ways is modernization using alternative financing, whereby the maintenance is looked after for some 25 years. Now, I know that the hon. members there don't like to look at other ways of solving problems, but this government is going to do that.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Castle Downs, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View.

Registries Database Access

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker. Police officers report to me that often those who face high insurance premiums resulting from poor driving records or impaired driving convictions purchase insurance for only one day to obtain a pink card, which then states that they are insured for a whole year. The Insurance Bureau of Canada and individual underwriters are unwilling to tie themselves into the Alberta Registries database, which would allow police officers to verify the validity of the insurance. My first question to the Solicitor General and Minister of Public Security: would having access to this information indeed assist our police officers on the road?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Security and Solicitor General.

Mr. Lindsay: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Yes, the information would be very helpful to get these lawbreakers off the road. I want to say that last year this government announced plans to develop a hundred million dollar computer system that will be accessible to all Alberta peace officers. This system will provide officers on the front line with a wide array of information that could and, hopefully, will include a driver's abstract and whether or not they are insured.

2:00

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental is to the Minister of Service Alberta. Since insurance companies benefit from not submitting this information to government as bad drivers are not desirable clients for them, why wouldn't the minister compel the insurance industry to share their information with our government and help us catch uninsured drivers?

Mr. Snelgrove: Mr. Speaker, Service Alberta looks after the registries of vehicles and the information around drivers' licences. In fact, when you get your licence plate, you're only required to present a snapshot of that day, a pink slip. In no way is Alberta Registries able to verify that is even still valid. So the Solicitor General has suggested a system that the police agencies may use, and that might be the appropriate tool, but the integrity and the security of the registry system would not be served in Alberta's best interests to be open to the insurance companies.

Mr. Lukaszuk: My last supplemental is to the Minister of Justice. How much does the province right now pay in claims annually with taxpayers' money for uninsured drivers claims?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice and Attorney General.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This issue of uninsured and hit-and-run drivers has been around since the '70s and is dealt with under the motor vehicle accident claims fund. Currently there is a \$6 per registration charge for vehicles registered in the province. Annually there is something in the order of \$20 million worth of claims which are paid out. Those \$6 registrations equate to \$16 million worth of contributions to that fund, and I can tell you also that some \$6.5 million is recovered from those bad drivers because we do pursue them.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Resource Development under Lake Beds

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government often talks about maintaining a healthy environment, yet as usual without independent environmental assessment the Energy and Utilities Board is left rubber-stamping every project that maximizes resource extraction. The fact that the government approved seismic testing under Marie Lake, a pristine lake in northern Alberta, clearly shows otherwise. Around the lake people are wondering why they are not getting access to government members and getting adequate information to make decisions about this development. To the Premier: does the Premier not see that development under lakes is a fundamental breach of public trust?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, either a couple of weeks ago or last week in the House this item came up, and I said that I'd be working with the minister responsible, the minister of sustainable resources, get all the information with respect to what environmental issues there are. Further, with respect to Marie Lake I know that the MLA for the area, the MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake, has attended all of the meetings and has brought that information forward to both ministers, so we've continued to work. To my knowledge, I didn't think that the seismic had been approved.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again to the Premier: will the Premier stop the practice of the sale of mineral rights underneath Alberta's lakes?

Mr. Stelmach: Mr. Speaker, this question has come up a couple of times with Albertans at various events and also around our caucus table: when there are certain blocks of land that are sold, how do you carve out any body of water or river? We had a good discussion with respect to that. In terms of the sales that have been completed, there are a whole bunch of things that come forward. What if somebody buys a lease, and they do some seismic and find out that there's no oil on it, do they give it back to the province and we pay them back? Of course not.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development. Your ministry has stated that the planned seismic testing will not have adverse effects on the aquatic environment. Will the minister explain what experts he has consulted, and will he table reports relative to the seismic activity on the lake?

Dr. Morton: Mr. Speaker, I'm very pleased to tell this House that my ministry will not authorize any seismic testing on Marie Lake when and if we see scientific evidence that it has probable adverse effect. In addition, I can assure you that I will require scientific monitoring before, during, and after any test to see if there is any adverse effect, and I will ensure that funding will be in place from the operator to mitigate any operational effect, any adverse effect if it occurs.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview, followed by the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

St. Joseph's General Hospital

Mr. Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last month the minister of health told us that the incident at St. Joe's hospital in Vegreville was an isolated incident. We found that not to be true because very shortly thereafter there were problems in Lloydminster; there have been problems in Canmore, many other hospitals. He told us at the time that 80 people could be infected, at risk of contracting hepatitis or HIV. Now, we find out that that number is 3,000. My question simply to the minister: how could the minister's initial estimate of 80 people be so wrong?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, it wasn't the minister's estimate that was wrong but the listening of the hon. member. What was said at the time was that it came to our attention because of the review of

cystoscopy, particularly with respect to cystoscopy with biopsies, that there were 80 people who had been identified as having had that procedure, that we were going to do a look back at all the records and determine what group of people needed to be followed up on. It's been public knowledge that we've been following up with the next highest risk after the cystoscopies and endoscopies and those sorts of tests, that tonsillectomies was the next and to broader procedures, to any procedure which involved any invasive process. That's been clearly in the public domain for some time.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, 3,000 was not the number that even came close at that particular time. My question simply to the minister is that there's a great worry among people that they are going to go into the hospital and come out sicker rather than healthier. There is a growing problem within the credibility of the hospital system. My question simply to the minister is this: does the minister not realize that by the government not dealing decisively with this issue, it is hurting – and I stress hurting – the credibility of the hospital system in Alberta?

Mr. Hancock: Well, Mr. Speaker, we did deal decisively with the issue. First of all, we made sure that the CSR in that particular hospital was closed and that no further sterilization processes were happening at that hospital so that it got appropriate sterilization procedures. The public health officer also closed the hospital for admissions for another incident with respect to the hospital. That process is ongoing, and we're very satisfied that the medical officer of health is supervising that process. So that happened. We also engaged immediately in a look back to see what group of people we should be involving in tests to determine whether there was any possibility – not probability, but possibility – of transferring blood-borne pathogens. That happened. A board of managers was put in place; that's in place now. So a number of very decisive steps have been taken and more to come.

Mr. Martin: Mr. Speaker, the reality is that these things keep coming out, and we hear more and more and more. The point that we were saying right from the start so people have some faith in our hospital system: why do we not now call for a full public inquiry? That's what people are asking for.

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, the full public inquiry that the hon. member is asking for will not solve any problems. What we've got in place is a Health Quality Council review. I've asked every health authority and every health profession to review their processes across the province, and we'll be taking a look at those. We'll have their responses by the end of April, and we'll be bringing into place as a result of that process the necessary processes and procedures to make sure that Albertans have faith in their system and can have faith in their hospitals when they go into them. But there's no point in alarming Albertans unnecessarily. This situation is under control, and the process to make sure it never happens again is ongoing.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Energy and Utilities Board

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Our caucus made the policy decision on the recommendation of the Minister of Energy to restructure Alberta's regulatory authority of the Energy and Utilities Board into two separate boards. Most of us recall that Alberta had a Public Utilities Board and an Energy Resources Conservation Board back in the 1990s. My question is to the Minister of Energy.

Why are we taking this step, which some call a backward step, to address the needs of today?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you categorically that this is not a step backwards; anything but. This government has a plan to build a stronger Alberta. We are looking to the future, and this restructuring is part of the plan. We're managing growth pressures in the province of Alberta. The landscape has changed significantly since 1995, when the EUB was established. There has been a population increase. There has been oil and gas development increase. There has been the emergence of a very, very solid oil sands development and restructured electrical markets.

2:10

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister. Issues such as land use, surface rights, and environmental protection are major concerns related to the oil and gas development and new electrical transmission projects. There's a growing need also for more public advocacy. Can the minister advise how this will affect the EUB's work to address public concerns?

Mr. Knight: Mr. Speaker, this province has a world-renowned regulatory system, and this change will enhance that system. We have very stringent approval processes for all energy projects, and Albertans can continue to expect those types of approvals to be made by these two boards.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. To the same minister: what does this mean, then, to the 500-kV line application which is currently before the board, given that this process could perhaps be interrupted because of the restructuring?

Mr. Knight: Well, Mr. Speaker, we have a responsibility to ensure that the needs of industry and the best interests of Albertans are protected while we go through this transition. The comprehensive implementation and the transition strategy that we have ensure that all applications, not any particular one, before the board are handled appropriately and in a timely manner.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Fort.

Community Facility Enhancement Program

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This government's community facility enhancement program grant distribution is out of order. In the year 2004-05 of the over 600 CFEP grants awarded, just 3 per cent of recipients received 25 per cent of the total CFEP funding. To the Minister of Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture: will the minister admit that CFEP grants are not being awarded on a consistent basis?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Goudreau: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, CFEP grants are awarded according to applications by our nonprofit registered societies. The CFEP is not predetermined in terms of how much individuals have. We do have maximum limits, that tend to go up to \$125,000, and we allocate those dollars on the basis of applications rather than on the basis of total dollars.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister. The Auditor General found that the minister has a great deal of flexibility with grants over \$125,000. Will the minister admit that as the size of the grant increases, the rules should be stronger, not weaker?

Mr. Goudreau: Well, Mr. Speaker, you know, all of them are evaluated on the basis of the organizations, the societies, past activities. The Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie is right. Certainly, as our numbers increase, we do provide additional scrutiny to the applications. We do make sure that they're registered societies. They have to be accountable. They have a certain time period to report back to us as to how those dollars are spent. If they don't do that, then we actually do the follow-up to see how we can reclaim some of those dollars.

Mr. Agnihotri: To the same minister: will the minister update CFEP guidelines so that all the potential grant applicants will have an equal opportunity to apply and to receive grants?

Mr. Goudreau: Mr. Speaker, I'm not sure where the member is coming from. Certainly, the member opposite is sort of alluding to the fact that we're treating different people differently. Every group and every organization has to meet the same guidelines. They fall under the same criteria. We're constantly reviewing those guidelines and criteria to keep them up to date, but we don't pick one organization over the other and have different rules for them. They are the same for everybody.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The organization called Vibrant Communities Calgary in partnership with business groups and nonprofit groups launched the living wage initiative. This idea was launched in the U.S.A. over 10 years ago and established in 130 U.S. cities. The city of Calgary has adopted this initiative by working with the living wage action team. I have recently received a copy of the living wage fact sheet. The question today is to the hon. Minister of Employment, Immigration and Industry. Is the minister aware of this living wage initiative and its recommendations to help our Albertan working poor?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Ms Evans: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I'm aware of the Vibrant Communities initiative. Our offices in Calgary act as a resource to the group. We're well aware of their initiatives to assist the working poor. Their predominant thrust is on the living wage. While the minimum wage is a concern of this government – and I'm exploring that – one of the things that we're trying to do is make sure that Albertans who need training get that opportunity. For the working poor and other Albertans we provide some \$300 million in our department to enhance their training opportunities as a major thrust of helping them cope with the lifestyle.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My first supplemental question is to the same minister. Given that Alberta has a law governing our employment standards and minimum wage, what is Alberta's minimum wage in comparison with those in other Canadian jurisdictions?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, to properly compare minimum wage and all the supplementary benefits provided would take some doing. On the minimum wage alone we are not ranked highly, and I do favour increasing the minimum wage but not until there's an opportunity to bring back a review, a solid review, to our government to look at the implications. We have about 97 per cent of Albertans that are covered with wages other than the minimum wage. When I'm meeting with some of the stakeholders, their theme to me is that generally speaking they're paying much more than the minimum wage even though they would previously have paid less because in our buoyant economy clearly employers are paying more.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. A living wage is defined as the amount of income needed to meet the basic needs, to maintain a safe and decent standard of living, and to have some savings for needs and goals in the future. With the cost of living in Calgary the living wage is calculated to be \$12 per hour. So my question to the same minister: given that employers already pay higher than the minimum wage of \$7, do you, Minister, have any plan to look at increasing it to a level closer to the living wage?

Ms Evans: Mr. Speaker, beyond looking at the minimum wage, to look at a living wage, you have to look at several other factors. There are many other supplementary benefits that both the federal and the provincial government provide for people who are receiving the minimum wage. You have to also look at such factors – and this is one that is cited to me by many of the people in the chambers of commerce, that young people and new workers may be restricted in the number of jobs that they could get if we increase the minimum wage and not recognize that the greater majority of people who are earning the minimum wage receive tips and other supplementary benefits on the job site. A family member earns a fraction of their total salary given the minimum . . .

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

Long-term Care

Ms Blakeman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A recent report from Ontario shows that antipsychotic drugs, which have serious side effects, are being used on long-term care patients who do not have psychosis or dementia. Almost two years ago Alberta's Auditor General also observed that some facilities "use chemical or physical restraints, often without adequate documentation, and in a few isolated cases, without apparent medical authorization." My questions are to the minister of health. The government of Ontario is introducing legislation to deal with the use and to curb the abuse of antipsychotic drugs. Why hasn't Alberta?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The member raises a very important and interesting question and one which I'm going to be very interested in looking at because I think it's very clear not only with respect to the drugs that are being mentioned but the utilization of drugs in general that there's an overutilization of drugs among the senior population, particularly those in long-term care. We need to have a very clear and solid look at that, so I will undertake to do so and find out whether any progress has been made in that area. I am not aware specifically what decision-making process has been undertaken with respect to that in Alberta, so I will look into it.

2:20

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. Well, Mr. Speaker, I think that we can all agree that Albertans in long-term care deserve the highest level of care available, but this government is allowing seniors to fall seriously behind other provinces. In British Columbia the government has set a goal of 5,000 new long-term care beds by 2008. Why hasn't this government set any long-term goals with specific targets for increasing long-term care beds?

The Speaker: The hon. minister.

Mr. Hancock: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, a very good question. I'd go back to a report that was done by a former colleague in this Legislature, the Broda report, which talked about the continuum of living situations for seniors and those who need living assistance. I think it's very important that we work not just on the long-term care beds, which is very important, but also on how we support seniors living in their own homes, how we make sure that seniors have the choices about aging in place and not leaving their spheres of influence and the comfort of their neighbourhood. So we need to look not just at goals for the long-term care, but we need to look at goals with respect to how we support seniors to age in place.

The Speaker: The hon. member.

Ms Blakeman: Well, thank you. Mr. Speaker, the only thing we got out of the Broda report was a significant increase in what we charge residents for long-term care.

Ontario's new legislation also includes a resident bill of rights, which wasn't contemplated in the Broda report, similar to the one that was recommended by Alberta Liberals almost two years ago. Will the minister finally take advice that would improve the quality of care for seniors and legislate a resident bill of rights which would include the right to refuse medication like chemical restraints and the right to be treated with dignity and respect?

Mr. Hancock: Mr. Speaker, I'll take advice from any Albertan who wants to give advice on how we can treat our seniors better in this province and how we can ensure that seniors are not abused. Now, the minister of seniors may wish to add to this particular area, but I can say this: this government cares very much about not only the accommodation for seniors, the health care for seniors, but how seniors get to age in place and live with respect and dignity and die with respect and dignity. So I will take advice from anyone on this area, any Albertan on this area.

The Speaker: That was 90 questions and answers today, hon. members.

head: **Orders of the Day**

head: **Written Questions**

[The Clerk read the following written questions, which had been head: accepted]

Unfunded Pension Liability

Q1. Mr. Miller:
What is the total projected cost to taxpayers of the government's current schedule for paying off the unfunded liabilities of public-sector pension plans broken down by plan?

Heritage Savings Trust Fund Investments

- Q4. Mr. Miller:
What was the total value of all Alberta heritage savings trust fund investments in tobacco-based companies at the end of fiscal years 2000-2001 through 2005-2006 and for the period April 1, 2006, to March 7, 2007?

Contracted Psychiatric Services

- Q5. Mr. Martin:
For each of the fiscal years 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and for the period April 1, 2006, to March 6, 2007, what was the total value of psychiatric services contracted by regional health authorities, RHAs, broken down by RHA, and what was the total value of psychiatric services contracted by the Alberta Mental Health Board?

Contracted Clinical Psychiatric Care

- Q6. Mr. Martin:
For each of the fiscal years 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, 2005-2006, and for the period April 1, 2006, to March 6, 2007, what was the total number of psychiatrists contracted to provide clinical services for regional health authorities, RHAs, broken down by RHA, and what was the total number contracted to provide clinical services by the Alberta Mental Health Board?

Sick Leave Taken by Registered Nurses

- Q7. Mr. Martin:
For each of the fiscal years 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 how many days of sick leave were taken by registered nurses, broken down by regional health authorities?

Sick Leave Taken by Licensed Practical Nurses

- Q8. Mr. Martin:
For each of the fiscal years 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005, and 2005-2006 how many days of sick leave were taken by licensed practical nurses employed by regional health authorities, RHAs, broken down by RHA?

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Wednesday, April 11, it's my pleasure to move that written questions 2 and 3 be dealt with today. As per our new temporary Standing Order changes written questions that have already been accepted have been read into the record. Written questions 9, 10, and 11 will stand and retain their places.

[Motion carried]

Funding Applications to Assist the Disabled

- Q2. Mr. Bonko asked on behalf of Ms Pastoor that the following question be accepted.
What was the total number of funding applications and the total number of applications approved under the assistance to persons with developmental disabilities program and the assured income for the severely handicapped program in fiscal years 2004-2005 and 2005-2006?

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Seniors and Community Supports.

Mr. Melchin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have circulated an amendment to Written Question 2. We'd be happy to accept the question. We're proposing an amendment that doesn't change, I would suggest, the information that's sought to be received, but we thought we'd better be clear in the wording on this.

What we're proposing is that it be amended in two places. We'd like to remove the reference to funding applications and just leave in "applications," so strike out the word "funding" but leave "applications." Well, first in that respect, applications approved to persons with developmental disabilities are not for direct funding but for support services that are funded by the department through service contracts. We'd also like to remove the word "assistance" from the title of the program as the formal name of the program is persons with developmental disabilities. It does not include "assistance to."

So the amended question would read:

What was the total number of applications and the total number of applications approved under the persons with developmental disabilities program and the assured income for the severely handicapped program in fiscal years 2004-2005 and 2005-2006?

This should still provide all of the information that is requested. It's just some wording changes.

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore on the amendment.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a friendly amendment, and it does still get to the crux of the question that the Member for Lethbridge-East was looking for, so we will accept that.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Should I call the question on the amendment?

Hon. Members: Question.

[Motion on amendment carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore to close the debate if you wish.

Mr. Bonko: Call the question.

[Written Question 2 as amended carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Oil Sands Royalty Reductions

- Q3. Mr. MacDonald asked that the following question be accepted.

For each of the fiscal years 1997-1998 through 2005-2006 what is the total value of all reductions to Crown royalties under the following categories of allowed costs as referenced in appendix L of the Alberta oil sands royalty guidelines: bonuses paid, corporate, environmental monitoring, hosting and entertainment, municipal taxes, stock option plans?

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, this written question is part of our ongoing commitment to the owners of the natural resources of this province, Albertans, to ensure that we are getting a fair share of the revenue that's generated from the oil sands projects through our royalty structure. Whenever you go through this entire royalty guideline, it is interesting to note that

whether one is paying 1 per cent royalty or paying 25 per cent royalty net, there are a lot of ways or methods or means for royalties to be reduced significantly.

Now, appendix L is a list of allowed and not allowed costs. With our written question this afternoon, again, we are centring around bonuses paid, corporate bonuses, environmental monitoring, hosting and entertainment, municipal taxes, and stock option plans.

2:30

Now, whenever we talk about the bonuses paid, the corporate bonuses paid, these bonuses are allowable costs so long as they are based on the results of an oil sands project but not allowed if they are based on the improvement in the company's stock or earnings per share. Isn't it true that the positive performance of an oil sands project would likely result in improvements in the company's stock? How exactly – and hopefully we will get the answer to this – does the government separate these two? How is the audit done? How does this audit process work? Who does it? Is it appropriate to have taxpayers – and this is a very good question, Mr. Speaker – paying corporate bonuses to individuals who may not even be Canadian citizens, let alone citizens of this province?

With environmental monitoring – this is something that I followed in the debate on Bill 3, and I don't think I heard enough of it – we have had a process in place for the last number of years where oil sands projects which used any sort of process or idea to reduce CO₂ emissions could have the costs subtracted from the royalty. I don't know, and I certainly hope the hon. Minister of Energy can explain to the House and to Albertans that this provision has already been used, that this provision has been used by ABC company, and that this is the result of the use of this provision. Now, I would really appreciate that information from the hon. minister because these costs relate to monitoring the air quality, soil, wildlife monitoring systems as well as reducing CO₂ emissions. We all realize that this is a generous royalty reduction, but Albertans need a justification for these royalty reductions, and hopefully we will get it.

Mr. Speaker, I wonder how these costs for environmental monitoring match up to some of the other costs such as the corporate bonuses. I suspect that Albertans would be very interested to know exactly where their money is being diverted. Now, the figure for this particular cost will be a reflection of the standards put in place by the EUB and Alberta Environment approval process. There was a lot said about that process in the Radke report, which hopefully we're going to get an opportunity at some point to discuss during this legislative term. Albertans are concerned about their environment, and I really think they would like to see these figures.

Now, hosting and entertainment. These costs are allowed to the extent that they are costs to the project – food, beverage, or entertainment expenditures – to the extent that they would be allowed by the Income Tax Act. In regard specifically to these hosting and entertainment costs this is very questionable, in my opinion. This is a very questionable cost to be putting on Albertans. I see a lot of room for abuse under this provision, and I would like to know, again, how these costs as they come into the Department of Energy are being audited. Is it appropriate, Mr. Speaker, to have Alberta taxpayers picking up the tab for refreshments on these project sites?

In regard to municipal taxes under this Written Question 3 these costs are allowed to the extent that they are municipal taxes and improvement fees. It is interesting to note that the royalty review is focusing not only on royalties but on taxation as well. I hope the review panel will be made aware that the municipal taxes that these project owners pay are actually in some cases partially if not all refunded to them. Now, I don't think many people in this province know that the municipal taxes which are paid by these project

owners are actually returned to them through this royalty reduction schedule or annex or appendix, as they call it. Again, I would think that this is a very, very generous regime.

I know, Mr. Speaker, that some jurisdictions in the U.S. in the lower 48 states actually allow counties or smaller jurisdictions to impose specific taxes on the resources extracted. Now, there are models for this in Texas, and the Minister of Finance in his leadership bid spoke about this or spoke about a system that certainly would allow municipalities a share, even a modest, wee share, as they say, of royalty revenue, but it would be interesting to see to what extent our government pays these companies back for the municipal taxes that they currently are paying.

Now, the stock option plans under Written Question 3, Mr. Speaker. These are allowed costs to the extent that they are directly attributable to the performance of a project and only when the costs have been incurred. They are not allowed if they are an award of stock as a bonus redeemable by a recipient. I would like to know, again, how these costs are audited. How does our provincial government here define "directly attributable"? How do you measure that? Again, is it appropriate for Albertans to be paying for these stock options? When it was brought up in question period earlier, a gentleman named Sam Spanglet, who was a member of the Royalty Review Panel, has – and I was pleased to learn that – unloaded the stock. I hope he has not unloaded it at a loss either.

Certainly, these are all questions that relate to our royalty structure on our oil sands projects. I'm not going to, in the interests of time, go through the entire appendix L, but in the course of required reading for hon. members of this House I would certainly encourage all hon. members to have a good look at this regulation and have a look at how it affects our collection of royalties and how much we do collect. It is very generous. There is information in here not only regarding corporate bonuses but also information on how we incent the export of bitumen away from this province into other jurisdictions for further upgrading. I know that we're going to be constructing upgraders in the east and north of the city of Edmonton, but we should have a look at this regulation as well and consider whether we should have as an allowed cost, Mr. Speaker, the transportation or pipeline tolls.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy to respond, to participate.

Mr. Knight: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, I would suggest to you that there has been much rambling that's just gone on that had very little to do with Written Question 3. I'm pleased to have the opportunity to explain why I am unable to accept Written Question 3.

The rules regarding which operating and capital costs are allowed and which are not allowed in determining Crown royalties are clear. Appendix L, which is referred to in the question, acts as a guideline providing illustrative examples of the types of costs that might be allowed. This is used to report costs by category, and for that reason details regarding individual items and costs are not available, and that is what is being requested through this question. This more detailed information is addressed through the Department of Energy's audit process, which looks at the complete extract of a company's revenues and expenses. It is at this point that these costs are checked and tested to ensure that they qualify. In fact, Mr. Speaker, on-site inspections may even be pursued to ensure that the costs qualify. If there are any ineligible costs identified during an audit process, they are disallowed, and the royalties are recalculated.

2:40

For important legal and commercial confidentiality reasons, including our obligation under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, individual audit results are not made public. To put this in perspective, Mr. Speaker, our royalty system operates similar to corporate and even, to some degree, personal income tax systems. The department obtains the equivalent of a tax return that provides overall numbers for such things as revenue, deductible costs of goods and services, eligible expenditures, and so on. These companies, much like a corporate or individual taxpayer, must retain the information related to their projects for audit purposes. Audits are then conducted to ensure that deductions made were eligible and appropriately documented.

Due to the fact that the information being sought under Written Question 3 is not available in the form requested, I request that the question be rejected.

The Speaker: Others to participate?

If not, I will call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to close the debate.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm very disappointed but not surprised that this minister would be unable to accept Written Question 3. It's just another reminder not only to this member but to all Albertans that this government is not open, that it's not transparent. It pretends it is, but whenever the general public listens to the Minister of Energy, they will certainly realize for themselves first-hand that this is not an open nor a transparent government, nor is the process for collecting these royalties. These are good questions, they're valid questions, and we need answers.

Now, the minister also neglected to tell the Assembly that if a financial audit is not done on an account in an oil sands project over a four-year time period, it can't be done. It can't be completed. He also neglected to mention the fact that the Auditor General in the past in various reports has brought up time and time again the whole issue of royalty calculation and how it works or how it does not work.

Again, I'm disappointed that we can't have any information with Written Question 3. In conclusion, I would encourage the hon. Minister of Energy to have another look, if he has not already, at the Auditor General's reports not only from this year but past years. He will see for himself that there is work to be done.

Thank you.

[Written Question 3 lost]

head: **Motions for Returns**

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Thanks, Mr. Speaker. Proper notice having been given on Wednesday, April 11, it's my pleasure to move that motions for returns 1, 2, and 3 be dealt with today. There being no additional motions for returns appearing on the Order Paper, there are none to stand and retain their places.

Thank you.

[Motion carried]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Internal Royalty Review

M1. Mr. MacDonald proposed that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all documents relating

to the government's review of royalties that concluded in 2006 as referenced by the former Minister of Energy in the *Calgary Herald* on July 15, 2006, including a list of groups, organizations, companies, or individuals consulted, and the total amount of money paid to each group, organization, company, or individual for their involvement.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Now, Motion for a Return 1 is quite important, and hopefully an answer will be provided by this government at this time. I think that last week, for the information of all hon. members of this Assembly, before question period on Wednesday, I did table a copy of that article. Now, the former Minister of Energy indicated that the review was completed and promised to provide documents, as I understand it, to back up his claim. Members of cabinet at the time, some members who are still in cabinet at this time, state that, well, they're not sure that the review ever happened. So someone is confused, and we need to find out who that someone is.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board states that he has an idea who is confused, and I'm not going to say that it's the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development, who indicated last fall that the review was dropped. This was in a *Calgary Herald* article from July 15, 2006.

An Hon. Member: That's got to be true.

Mr. MacDonald: If it's in the *Calgary Herald*, you bet it's true. I know that you have a great deal of difficulty accepting what's printed in our newspapers from time to time, but my advice to you in this case would be to accept it.

Other Tory leadership candidates, whenever they were questioned about this internal review, stated that it had been done. Now, there's definitely a conflict of information here.

Mr. Rodney: Is Enron involved?

Mr. MacDonald: Enron is not involved in this. No, hon. member, it is not, but I can assure you that before June we will get to the Enron matter in this House.

Certainly, whenever you look at not only the review and the *Calgary Herald's* comment on it, if we look at statements in this House, and if we can't accept what the *Herald* had to say – now, this is interesting. This is from question period, Mr. Speaker, on August 24, 2006. This is a question from the gentleman who is now the Minister of Energy to the former Minister of Energy on the royalty review. The hon. Minister of Energy was asking last summer if this is the conclusion to the royalty review. Of course, the Minister of Energy at that time goes on at length, and I'm glad we didn't have the 45-second rule then because this is a long response.

Certainly, I would urge members of the House to check *Hansard* from August 24, 2006, and have a look themselves. There is quite an exchange here between the Minister of Energy and the former Minister of Energy. Again, I'm not trying to overload the Minister of Energy with extra work, but I think he really needs to read this and accept Motion for a Return 1, that is on the Order Paper in my name. Now, this is not the only time this has been brought up, not only in question period but also during written questions last spring, about all the details surrounding this royalty review. We need that information. Albertans need that information, and I'm requesting the department to please provide the information as requested in Motion for a Return 1.

Thank you.

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Energy is the respondent.

2:50

Mr. Knight: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm pleased to speak to Motion for a Return 1, which I'll be asking to be rejected today. [interjection] Yeah, it's an unfortunate circumstance that I find myself in. I find it quite interesting that this motion is nearly identical to written questions that were addressed in the Assembly last year. Last year. That said, I'll address the issue once again, as I did last week – last week – during question period.

Royalty reviews are part of the Department of Energy's normal ongoing business. That ongoing analysis ensures that our royalty framework strikes the right balance, providing Albertans with a fair return on our natural resources and, Mr. Speaker, maintaining a competitive system that allows our economy to prosper. As I pointed out to the hon. member last week, changes to four of our royalty programs were made as a result of work done by the Minister of Energy last year. These changes will increase royalties paid to the province by about \$300 million once they're fully implemented.

I'd also like to make it very clear that the Department of Energy does not pay individuals, groups, or organizations it consults with, as is stated in the member's motion. However, Mr. Speaker, we did contract the services of experts in the field of royalties to develop studies and reports on royalties. The member may wish to read those nine studies and reports, which are available in the department's library.

Today the Clerk tabled documents recently released in response to a freedom of information request that is relevant to this motion for a return. There are more than 500 pages of documents in each set. I encourage the hon. member to review the 500-plus pages of documents tabled today and to make a personal trip to the library so that he can review the reports and studies, as any Albertan can freely do.

Mr. Speaker, in light of the relevant and substantive information I have made available to the Legislature and to the public, I recommend that Motion for a Return 1 be rejected.

The Speaker: Others to participate?

Then shall I call on the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar to conclude the debate?

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That was an interesting series of reasons to reject this motion, interesting but also at the same point astonishing, and it's astonishing for the following reasons. The Conservative government didn't contradict themselves last May whenever that written question was being debated, like they did last summer over the royalty review and the royalty double-speak, as the *Calgary Herald* called it, when they all were in a crowded field wanting to be in the Premier's chair. Now, the Minister of Energy at the time, who wasn't in the race for the Premier's chair, indicated, and I quote: we looked at royalties for quite a while on a number of fronts, and we've come back in the interim and decided that we do get a fair share in Alberta. End of quote. This was on August 24, 2006. That statement seemed to cool the chorus, as they state here, from the Tory leadership contenders, most of whom, interestingly enough, last summer favoured a review.

The Minister of Sustainable Resource Development stated at that time and indicated a wish for a close examination of the 1 per cent royalty holiday for Alberta oil sands. Other leadership contenders, including Jim Dinning and Mark Norris and the eventual winner, the hon. Premier, also indicated that they would initiate a public review if they won the leadership. Well, the gentleman certainly has initiated a public review, and full credit there.

When we reject this Motion for a Return 1, this minister and this government are failing to reveal that the government received only

a 19 per cent share of oil and gas revenues in 2004 – these are the numbers that are most recently available – when its own target is between 20 and 25 per cent. The province's royalty take has actually dropped in the last number of fiscal years. I don't understand why this motion for a return would be rejected.

Now, also in August of last year a Conservative MLA and leadership hopeful at that time and now the current Minister of Sustainable Resource Development indicated – and I'm sorry if I offend the Minister of Energy; again I'm going to quote from the *Calgary Herald* – that he would reopen the issue if elected Premier, particularly the 1 per cent royalty holiday for Alberta's oil sands. The internal review wasn't even completed, he added, suggesting that it was dropped after Klein's crippling leadership review vote just this past spring, which hastened his retirement to late this year. This is a quote from the *Calgary Herald* on the 12th of July, 2006.

The minister indicated that the consultants aren't paid. Well, Wood Mackenzie was paid to do this study. They were paid in one fiscal year – and I'm recalling from Public Accounts – \$70,000. Then the next year I think it was a substantial amount, much higher than \$70,000. Their modus operandi is royalty reviews and structures across the entire oil patch. So I think the minister is really playing with words because taxpayers do pay megabucks for various reports. I would urge the minister to check out the rules and regulations that are in the Department of Energy library.

Sean Kochan from our research staff and myself went up there last summer, and I think some reporters have also been there. It's not as open and transparent as the hon. minister is telling us. We cannot have photocopies of all that information. In fact, this Global Oil and Gas: Risks and Rewards document, a report prepared for the government of Alberta by Wood Mackenzie – we were only allowed to get photocopies of parts of it.

The Speaker: Hon. member, I must draw to the attention of the Assembly Standing Order 29(3)(b), and I must now call the question.

[Motion for a Return 1 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for St. Albert.

Public/Private School Construction

M2. Mr. Flaherty proposed that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing copies of all feasibility reports, studies, proposals, cost-benefit analyses, correspondence, e-mails, and memos regarding the use of public/private partnership, P3, funding arrangements for school construction conducted from fiscal year 2002-2003 to 2005-2006 and for the period April 1, 2006, to March 7, 2007.

Mr. Flaherty: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to speak to this request, it would be vital, I think, to the schools across this province who are being tutored or asked to consider this proposal to make sure that we have the data with which to analyze what has been done and know both sides of this question. The motion is crucial for us, and I know that the school boards in St. Albert are very interested in getting this information, if there is any available, to be able to judge how this P3 concept works and some of the issues involved.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'll sit down. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: The hon. President of the Treasury Board.

Mr. Snelgrove: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Well, it's certainly not our nature to keep any information that might be helpful on this, but very little information from 2002 to 2006 or any of the years in

between would be relevant or even practical to gather. To suggest that we could collect the e-mails and all of this to bring together any kind of relevance to the current situation where we are looking at all forms of constructions costs, certainly, as the Auditor General has suggested, we should. But to take the staff and the time required to go back and bring forward what would be considered mostly irrelevant – Lord knows that we get enough help with information that we not only don't use but that also has no relevance to what we're trying to do. To accept this motion would create an amount of work that would be not in proportion to any possible benefit from it.

With that, Mr. Speaker, and for those reasons we will be rejecting Motion for a Return 2.

3:00

The Speaker: Others to participate? Hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore, please proceed.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I find it a little disappointing that the President of the Treasury Board and the government itself would be unwilling or unable to provide some documentation or some proof as to their position with regard to P3s. Yes, it was noted that the Auditor General did and should say that they should explain or at least explore some of the relative benefits of P3s. The Member for St. Albert asked to quantify where the schools are and our position with regard to P3s – we asked for the information – and the government is unable to provide any. What conclusion are we and the public supposed to be left with in regard to the benefits, actual cost benefits, with regard to P3s? We have concerns with regard to the Anthony Henday and the cost overruns with regard to P3s.

Again, this is specific information that we're seeking so that school boards could be able to identify to their electorate, who in some cases have no chance of getting schools, with the carrot being dropped by developers in conjunction with the government saying: we'll give you a P3. I am of the belief that it should be the government's responsibility to provide construction for schools and to maintain the costs. All the relative information as well as monies funding the schools, upgrading them, and keeping them safe and secure: we need that information. The public needs that information. What other studies have the government undertaken to be able to provide the public, the opposition, Albertans with that sort of information to be able to justify P3s?

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, in regard to Motion for a Return 2 here under the name of the hon. Member for St. Albert I'm really disappointed in the response from the President of the Treasury Board. I realize he wasn't President of the Treasury Board last summer when it had a meeting to discuss the financing of the Balzac racetrack project. Perhaps he should have been there. Being the prudent person that he is with the tax dollars, perhaps he should have been there. This was prior to the move to put some funding into that project through the estimates debate in August of last summer.

Specifically to the P3s, I would remind the hon. member that through the FOIP process we received documents that indicated that it is a routine measure now for this government to determine whether a project has any merit for a P3, including the expansion to Olds College to facilitate the development at Balzac. There is a lot of discussion on the merit of a P3. Interestingly enough, this wasn't to be a P3 project, but there are going to be ponies, ponies, ponies there at some point; there's no doubt in my mind.

I would like to remind the hon. President of the Treasury Board and all other members of this House that this motion for a return should not be rejected. It's a routine way, unfortunately, for this government to conduct their business: the P3s. The request of the hon. Member for St. Albert is not unusual or anything. It's of benefit, certainly, to Albertans, and it would be a testament to the commitment to be open and accountable and transparent . . .

Mr. Boutilier: Which we are.

Mr. MacDonald: . . . that this government is making. Unfortunately, hon. Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo, you are not. Thank you.

The Speaker: Others?

Then I'll call on the hon. Member for St. Albert to close the debate.

Mr. Flaherty: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. The President of the Treasury Board used the word "irrelevant," I think he said.

An Hon. Member: How do you spell it?

Mr. Flaherty: Well, I'll ask you to spell it for him in caucus. You can do that.

In this particular aspect of this program, this business of P3s, we're talking about a new direction in this province, and for this gentleman to say that it's irrelevant for 62 school boards across this province that are looking for some leadership in terms of accountability and the direction they're going in doesn't make sense. I happened to have had the honour, sir, of serving as a civil servant, and many of our proposals had to be rational and supported. This is what you're asking: 62 school boards across this province to give us some feedback as to should they buy into this or not, and you're telling me that it's irrelevant. I'm sorry, sir. I expected more from you, and I hope to see more from you in the future.

The budget, now, is the other thing that I think is very crucial in this. When you're making this decision, you're not interested in kids. You're interested in this word "debt." You're trying to get rid of the word "debt."

Mr. Boutilier: That's not true.

Mr. Flaherty: You listen carefully. You are.

Mr. Boutilier: That is not true.

Mr. Flaherty: It is.

When you're asking school boards to take this on, you've got to look at the question of operational problems. None of you has probably been to the schools, sir. You're asking them to take a look at operational problems, and you're not even giving it a rationale. It doesn't make sense.

The other thing that seems to be avoided on this whole thing of P3s is the use of community schools. That seems to be irrelevant in this thinking that you've shown here today. You've got to show some direction on this matter. How is this whole thing going to fit into the community? Mr. President of the Treasury Board, I expect you to know more.

Now, I think the other thing that's important is the matter of agreements with municipalities. When you're looking at the question of agreements with municipalities, you're changing the structure. You have joint use. When you don't look at this issue in

terms of, again, informing school boards of your rationale for this decision, then I think that it's a sad day in Alberta for not looking at that.

The other thing that's going to happen – and maybe you could clarify this after you do some research, Mr. President. You can look at the whole question of children's safety and security. Listen carefully. If you're planning to build these things around a shopping centre with all the issues of that, then I think that you've got to look very carefully at that question.

Then the whole question, again, was the proper use of grounds and facilities and those kinds of things which usually are around a school. In your rationale for doing this, there is no evidence that you've done your homework. And you know what, sir? I am really disappointed. I can't understand how anybody could go out and ask a community school or a school district to get involved in this concept without having some of these questions answered.

I thank you.

The Speaker: The debate has concluded unless it's a point of order.

[Motion for a Return 2 lost]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods on behalf of the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre.

3:10 Health Facilities Infrastructure Capital Plans

M3. Mrs. Mather moved on behalf of Ms Blakeman that an order of the Assembly do issue for a return showing a copy of all long-term capital plans for infrastructure related to health facilities approved in fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2005-2006 and for the period April 1, 2006, to March 7, 2007.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question was submitted to find out what sort of centralized planning exists within the department of health when it comes to health infrastructure for our entire province. We want to get a sense of the capital planning process.

Health regions submit a wish list – we know that – a wish list of projects to the department, where funding decisions and priorities are made. Rarely do we receive an explanation of why one project was selected over another, and regions are unable to plan for their future growth because the capital planning process is so unpredictable. It's a guessing game. If we had explanations, it would help regions with planning and certainly give us some confidence that there was a plan. We want to know exactly what long-term plans the ministry has for health facilities across the province.

The amendment that's suggested here is a copy of all the health authority multiyear capital plans approved by the health regions and submitted to the minister in fiscal years 2004-2005 to 2005-2006 and for the period April 1, 2006, to March 7, 2007. This amendment, I think, should not be accepted; it should be rejected, especially in light of this government's commitment to openness and transparency.

We're against the proposed changes because the amendment goes against the principle of the information that we're seeking and demonstrates that the information that the department of health should have perhaps just doesn't exist. The amendment demonstrates that while the government does not have centralized control over health infrastructure planning, they do like to centralize control of the information and ensure that no useful information is revealed.

By failing to provide a long-term capital plan, it appears that once again this government is not capable of long-term planning. We need something that gives us some confidence that there is a plan.

Albertans deserve better than this. They need something that will tell them that there is a vision and that we have a plan that will support that vision and bring it to fruition.

The Speaker: Okay. The hon. member was speaking on Motion for a Return 3. There is no amendment that has been moved yet. So, hon. Government House Leader?

Mr. Hancock: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. In fact, I was prepared to move a motion to amend 3 so that we could accept it, that we could make sure that the motion was in a form that we could actually provide that information on. However, I'm given to believe that the motion as amended wouldn't be acceptable by the member putting it forward, so I don't see any purpose in going through that process. So I would just suggest that we reject the motion.

The reason for rejecting the motion, Mr. Speaker, is that the motion calls for "a copy of all long-term capital plans for infrastructure related to health facilities approved in fiscal years," and the fiscal years are noted. Well, in fact, that's not the process that's used. What we were going to suggest is that we could provide the health authority multiyear plans which the health authorities approve and forward to government, but I'm given to believe from the representation made by the hon. member that that's not what they're after. They, in fact, know and understand that there are multiyear capital priorities put forward. That's not going to answer the question that they really want answered, so I would suggest that we reject this question because the question in its current format can't be answered. There is no answer to it.

In terms of the capital process, if that's what they would really like to have information on, I'd be more than happy to sit down with the critic or any other member and talk about how we do the process. There is, in fact, a capital process. There is, in fact, a capital committee. There's a committee of deputies that takes a look at all the projects that come forward and do a prioritization of the projects with respect to the need for the projects, how those projects will fit into the long-term delivery process, and then, of course, an allocation of resources to those projects in accordance with the priority that they've been given by the deputies' review and by the capital committee. So there is a process in place, but that process doesn't conform to what's being asked for here.

I have really no alternative. I could have asked for an amendment which would give the information about what plans had come forward, but that's obviously not the information that's wanted, so I would suggest that the House reject the question. If the hon. member or the person who put the motion on the agenda wants to sit down and discuss the capital process, I'd be more than happy to do it.

The Speaker: Others to participate?

Then, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods to conclude the debate on Motion for a Return 3.

Mrs. Mather: Okay. Thank you. I guess I have a question for clarification. I think that the hon. member has spoken exactly about what it is we had intended with the question. But the amendment, it appears, would provide us some information, which is better than none. We would like to know how decisions are made in that capital planning process. What are the priorities? Why are some given priority over others? That was the original question. The amendment would at least provide us some information, and we feel that some information is better than none at this point.

[Motion for a Return 3 lost]

head: **Public Bills and Orders Other than
Government Bills and Orders
Second Reading**

**Bill 204
Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan
Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007/
Loi modificative de 2007 sur les emblèmes
de l'Alberta (reconnaissance
du fait franco-albertain)**

[Debate adjourned April 2: Mr. Cao speaking]

The Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Fort, with 64 minutes available for this debate, four by the hon. member.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to continue from the last debate. An emblem is a symbol, and symbolism is an important aspect of our culture. Through symbolism we communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings. A Franco-Albertan emblem is a symbol that represents a people's heritage with a long history of the formation of Alberta. It is long before the formation of our province of Alberta and our nation of Canada. Un emblème est un symbole, et le symbolisme est un aspect important de notre culture. Par le symbolisme nous communiquons des idées, des pensées, et des sentiments.

[Mr. Marz in the chair]

I applaud Bill 204 because I appreciate and respect what Franco-Albertans have done for our province. J'applaudis la loi 204 parce que j'apprécie et je respecte ce que les Franco-Albertains ont fait pour la province de l'Alberta. Je crois que l'emblème des Franco-Albertains devrait être identifié comme emblème officiel de l'Alberta. I believe that the Franco-Albertan emblem should be recognized as the official emblem of Alberta.

Merci, M. le Président. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise and speak to Bill 204, Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007. The French community has a rich history in this province. The French community plays an important role in our province. The members of the community contribute a great deal to our province, and as Albertans we are proud to recognize their heritage. It's our opportunity to affirm our commitment to recognition of the rights, policies that services must be delivered to, and symbols that are important to Franco-Albertans.

Mr. Speaker, the object of this bill is to officially recognize the Franco-Albertan flag, and the rationale: Alberta Liberals are inclusive, and the bill appears to be widely supported by Franco-Albertan communities all over Alberta. Similar legislation was passed in Ontario and Saskatchewan with broad support. We want to support the Franco-Albertan community.

3:20

I just want to ask a few questions, especially to the sponsor, the Member for Peace River, because I think most of the members sitting in this House don't know what the symbols stand for. According to the Emblems of Alberta Act, Alberta currently has 12 official emblems: the armorial bearings of Alberta, the flag of Alberta, the floral emblem of Alberta, the official grass of Alberta, the Alberta tartan, the Alberta dress tartan, the official bird of

Alberta, the official stone of Alberta, the official tree of Alberta, the official colours of Alberta, the official mammal of Alberta, and the 12th one is the official fish of Alberta.

As I said, Mr. Speaker, Ontario passed a similar piece of legislation in the year 2001. Saskatchewan passed a similar piece of legislation in 2005.

I have a few questions to ask the hon. Member for Peace River. What are the legal implications of passing this legislation? Does the government plan to fly this flag on the Legislature Building? How broad is the support for this bill within the Franco-Albertan community? Has the government been approached by any organizations opposing this bill? These are a few questions. I would really appreciate it if he could answer sometime today or maybe when we debate in the next stage.

You know, Mr. Speaker, the recognition of the flag won't be the first in this country. On June 21, 2001, Ontario adopted the Franco-Ontarian flag as one of its seven official emblems. On December 2, 2005, Saskatchewan did the same thing. So the bill is to recognize the symbol. We propose that the government adopt the bill to recognize the flag as an official emblem.

The French language has been present in Alberta for more than 200 years. The Alberta French-speaking community is the third French-speaking community in Canada outside of Quebec. French is one of the two official languages of Canada. The province of Alberta recognizes the importance of serving its citizens in French upon request when it's possible.

The Franco-Albertan flag was unveiled for the first time on March 6, 1982. From then on the Alberta French-speaking community has consistently used it as its emblem. It is therefore appropriate now to recognize it officially as the emblem of that community. "Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of [the province of] Alberta, enacts as follows": in this Act, Mr. Speaker, Alberta French-speaking community means the community of persons who have the right under subsection 23.(1) or (2) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, without regard to subsection 23.(3) of that Charter, to have their children receive their primary and secondary school instruction in the French language in Alberta.

The Franco-Albertan emblem: Mr. Speaker, I think the majority of the Franco-Albertan community supported this one, and this is a great opportunity for us to recognize it. The flag described in the schedule to this act is recognized as the emblem of Alberta's French-speaking community. This act comes into force on the date it receives royal assent.

A description of the emblem of the Alberta French-speaking community: the flag is blue, white, and red, with the white in the upper left corner and a red wild rose in the lower right corner. The wild rose, the provincial flower of Alberta, represents the province, as does the field of blue in the upper right corner, the white represents la Francophonie, and the blue and white stripes represent the waters and roads travelled throughout the province by francophone explorers and colonists. So I urge all the members of this House to support this bill.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Egmont, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in support of Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007. Je suis très fier d'ajouter ma voix pour supporter le projet de loi 204 du Membre de Rivière de la Paix. This is a very meaningful and thoughtful piece of legislation

and not just for those of us of francophone descent. My own francophone background goes back five generations here in Alberta and 11 generations in Quebec and God knows how many across the ocean. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Peace River for recognizing Alberta's French community in this way and perhaps initiating something here that will eventually lead to the appropriate recognition of every culture that makes up Alberta's mosaic.

This legislation will add the current emblem of l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta to Alberta's list of official emblems. I agree with the overall intent of this legislation as an appropriate homage for francophone Albertans past, present, and future. The francophone community in Alberta does have a special history in our province, and it's appropriate for the Assembly to give recognition to this unique heritage. The lineage of today's Franco-Albertan is intrinsically bound to this province's history.

Since the arrival of the early French-Canadian settlers in Alberta many great Franco-Albertans have lived, have contributed, and are contributing greatly to our family. People like Father Albert Lacombe are well known for their contributions. Mr. Speaker, my father was fond of talking about serving mass for Father Lacombe in Midnapore in the early 1900s. People like Dr. Rouleau: you know, before there was a Calgary, there was a Rouleauville in and around the site of the existing Catholic cathedral in Calgary. So much of the early pioneering effort in southern Alberta was made by French Canadians.

Today Alberta is fortunate to have organizations working on behalf of the Franco-Albertan community: the Francophone Secretariat, for which, of course, I need to congratulate my good friend from Bonnyville-Cold Lake for all of his efforts in making that happen here in Alberta, l'Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, le Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta, et le Centre d'accueil et d'établissement d'Edmonton. Whether it's through the promotion of French culture or ensuring access to French language resources, these organizations ensure that Alberta's policies mirror the bilingual and multicultural measures taken on at the federal level. The ability to remain true to one's cultural roots while still engaging in the activities that give a community its collective identity is what it means to be an Albertan and a Canadian.

3:30

Alberta is a most beautiful mosaic made up of dozens of cultures and languages that all contribute through their special colour and their special shade to the tiles that make up this most amazing mosaic. Mr. Speaker, I'm reminded of once admiring a beautiful painting in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. As I walked closer, I was amazed to discover that it was not a painting at all but a mosaic made up of millions of tiny marble tiles, each with their subtle coloured differences but together creating a masterpiece. Here in Alberta we have over 3 million souls, each contributing their own cultural colour and their background to the richness and beauty of our peoples.

So, Mr. Speaker, perhaps this is just the beginning. Perhaps this bill brought forward by the hon. Member for Peace River will be the beginning of a celebration of all cultures found in this great province of Alberta or, perhaps, a new process that will allow others to follow and celebrate their roots as part of this great mosaic masterpiece that we call Alberta. And I would urge all my colleagues to vote in favour of this bill.

Merci, M. le Président.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It gives me a special pleasure – and I want to underscore the word “special” – to rise and speak in favour of Bill 204, Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007.

I should explain why it gives me a very special pleasure to be speaking to this bill and speaking in strong support of this bill. Edmonton-Strathcona, the riding that I've had the pleasure and the honour of representing in this Legislature for the last 10 years, has a substantial number of residents who have this proud Franco-Albertan heritage, who are very proud of their francophone heritage and culture, and who have been, in fact, a very vibrant and expanding part of the Edmonton-Strathcona riding in this beautiful city of Edmonton.

As well, Mr. Speaker, we all know that the francophone presence in this province has always had a great deal of significance. Whether you think of the arts, the professions, businesses, rural or urban communities, francophones have played a very, very notable and significant role over the centuries. In fact, francophones were the first Europeans to come to a place which became the province of Alberta. They were the pioneers. They were here at the time when the frontiers westward were being pushed, and they played a very significant role. Over 500 communities, places, rivers, lakes, et cetera, bear francophone names as testimony to that historic presence of francophones in this province.

Over recent years within the francophone community not only have the numbers been growing, but the diversity within that growing community has also been growing and been welcomed. I have been in attendance at a variety of functions in my own constituency of Edmonton-Strathcona where this growing diversity has been represented and reflected in ever increasing ways and numbers. In my constituency there is an art gallery which presents an exhibit on a regular basis. The artistic contributions, be they in the form of paintings, weaving, pottery, sculpture – in all of these variety of forms the francophone cultural expression, artistic expression, is represented in this art gallery, and I'm a frequent visitor to their art gallery. Just last year, in fact, I think the art gallery mounted a mural which was a sort of narrative in colour of the very rich history and the contributions of the francophone community in Alberta. So Alberta's history is very difficult to conceive without recalling and celebrating the history of francophones.

Mr. Speaker, 19 years ago, in 1988, this Legislature passed an act called the Languages Act, which mandated French as a language of this Assembly. It's always important to remember our own history, and as part of that history just a year before the 1988 Languages Act, in 1987, exactly 20 years ago today, the *Edmonton Journal* had on the front page a reference to that history with a picture of then NDP MLA Leo Piquette, who rose in this House and asked a question in French.

But we were behind the times, and there was an unfortunate incident that developed from his attempt to ask a question in French. Thankfully, we all learned, and this Assembly proved very resilient and responsive to the desire expressed by Mr. Leo Piquette on the floor of this House on the part of francophones to be recognized officially in this province and for them to be able to speak and ask questions in their own language in the Assembly, which represents their history, their people as well as our people who call themselves Albertans. So 1988 was a very important year in the sense that this Assembly in a very resilient fashion responded to that desire and passed the Languages Act of '88.

This Bill 204 is a nice sort of follow-up to that in that it takes another step forward in the recognition of the francophone presence in Alberta by way of recognizing the emblem, bringing into

existence by legislation the francophone emblem, which is part of this act, displayed on page 2 of this act, Mr. Speaker.

Another interesting feature of this bill, a physical piece of evidence of the recognition that we award, is that this bill is in both languages, English and French. I'm very pleased to see that. I'm sure that my constituents are very, very pleased about the fact that we are discussing a bill in this Assembly having to do with the further recognition in the form of an emblem of the francophone presence in Alberta that is presented in both languages. What a proud day, Mr. Speaker.

I as a new Canadian – I've been here for 46 years, but I talk about being new in the sense that I adopted Canada as my country – have been extremely proud of the decision that I made, very happy about the decision, and very proud of what I've seen that decision come to mean for me and for Canadians in general. Canada has evolved enormously over the last 46 years that I've been around, Mr. Speaker, evolved in the sense of making progress forward. Many things have changed in Canada; many things have changed in Alberta. This bill is part of this ongoing evolution and change.

It's a pleasure, Mr. Speaker, to support this bill, to speak in the name of my constituents when I speak to this bill and when I support this bill. Clearly, no single piece of legislation, no single gesture, whether it's in the form of legislation or otherwise, can do all the things that need to be done in order to ensure the diversity in our midst in terms of the presence of francophones here, which, as I said, is of the longest duration of any groups who represent Alberta's population, but diversity in many other ways as sort of manifests itself. Just a month ago, I guess, there was this unfortunate incident up in the tar sands in the Fort McMurray area. A francophone worker was let go by an employer because he could not express himself clearly and fluently in English. I think that we need to develop protections for francophones, protections for them at their place of work so that they cannot be relieved of their jobs simply on the grounds that they cannot speak clearly in English.

3:40

So we need to move forward. We need to provide those protections for speakers of other languages, particularly in this case – and I'm talking about Bill 204, so I will limit myself to francophones – speakers of French. We must provide them legal protections so they cannot lose their jobs, so they cannot be forced to lose their jobs, so that jobs cannot be taken away from them because they can only express themselves clearly in their own mother tongue; that is, French, which is one of the two official languages of this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to have had a chance to speak to this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just for the benefit of the young audience that has come in as part of their tour of the Legislature, we're speaking on Bill 204, Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act. What that is is giving official recognition to the history of French-speaking Albertans and what they have given the province as far as benefits and how we have all benefited as well. So it's giving official recognition to it. I know that if you don't know what's going on here, sometimes it's quite boring. I'll agree with that particular point.

I'm rising and speaking in favour of this particular bill there, Mr. Speaker. I, in fact, received calls from a number of constituents, and that's quite amazing because this sometimes is buried in the back,

being a private member's bill, and Albertans sometimes aren't aware of what's going on. But these particular people have obviously paid very close attention to what's going on with regard to this particular bill. Overwhelming support from a number of my constituents who, of course, are Franco-Albertan, and they're very, very proud of this particular legislation that's coming across. They expressed that this is long overdue, that their significant contributions to the province, like others who have contributed – like I said, it's long overdue. They're quite proud of the fact that we are in fact taking this opportunity to recognize them and their long, long history, for what they have brought to Alberta.

There have been a lot of positive things over the last several weeks when people have been debating this bill. In fact, the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona has added that as well.

Mr. Agnihotri: Other communities too?

Mr. Bonko: Well, yeah, we also recognize other communities as well, and this is part of that. We're trying not to leave out any community, especially this particular community that has given so much to us.

So I do speak in support of this. I don't want to go over everything that's already been said, but when the time does come to vote, I certainly will be supporting this bill. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Bill 204 recognizes the Franco-Albertan flag and formally acknowledges the important history of Alberta in general and, in particular, the French-speaking community in Alberta. It addresses the important role that French Canadians have played in our province. This particular emblem, the flag, has actually been used in this province since the early '80s, so it's not a strange emblem. It's not new to us. We have over 330,000 Albertans who can trace their ancestry to French descent, and specifically there are about 66,000 Albertans who are classified as francophones.

French education in Alberta is something that we can be really proud of. It's been a phenomenal success. Part of the reason for that success is the number of Franco-Albertans and French-speaking Albertans, that has been increasing significantly. But I can say that I was fortunate to be in one of the first schools in Edmonton to offer French immersion. That was at a time when it was very exciting, an exciting development, and some viewed it as very daring. Now it's accepted and expected as a positive option for students, and that's something that we can be proud of. The French culture and language are also legally recognized in Alberta, and that is a wonderful thing.

I believe that the interests of our large francophone community are represented by more than 200 regional and community organizations, and adopting this particular Franco-Albertan emblem as an official emblem will increase our awareness of the large cultural community and their contributions to this province. Today we have the opportunity to provide recognition to the francophone heritage and its importance for all of us when we look back at the history of this province.

I also would like to commend the hon. Member for Peace River for bringing this forward, and I'm happy to support this bill.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise, too, to urge support from all hon. members of the Assembly for Bill 204,

the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007, as proposed by the hon. Member for Peace River. Certainly, it is a worthy piece of legislation. It's about time.

It's interesting to note that as we debate this this afternoon, earlier today on the front page of one of our daily papers – and I won't mention the name of it in case the government members get riled up. That paper did a detailed story, if not today then recently, on a former member from Lac La Biche, Mr. Leo Piquette, and his unfortunate experiences when he wanted to ask a question to the minister of education at the time in French. I think he got five or six words into his question, and he was shut down. Times have changed, rightfully so, in this province, but that was a wake-up call for us all. In fact, after Mr. Piquette had been shut down, over 500 Franco-Albertans descended on the front steps of the Legislative Assembly to express their opinion and their outrage. In a democracy it is nice to see that people can express their opinion or their outrage without fear of reprisal. That's something that we should always foster in a mature democracy like the one that we live in.

With this bill it's the first time that I can recall – and I could be wrong, Mr. Speaker – in my time here that we have a piece of legislation that's written in both English and French. Certainly, we had statements by respective members in both English and French. We had the debate, I believe in 1999, on the role of Quebec in Canadian Confederation. But this is the first bill that I can recall.

When we look at the outstanding contribution of the Franco-Albertan community to the development of this province, we perhaps should look at this as a first step towards having each statute in this province translated into this country's two official languages: French and English. I think I will see that, not necessarily in my time in this Legislative Assembly but certainly in my lifetime. I think it is a project that we should consider out of respect to one of the two founding nations of this fine country that we call home, that each statute that's in the cupboard over there be translated and printed, of course, in the French language.

3:50

Now, one only has to look at the map of this province – and you see the place names, Mr. Speaker – to see the contributions that Franco-Albertans have made to the settlement and development of this province. Whether it's towns or villages or rivers or lakes, the French community has gone a long way towards the development of this province. In fact, it was barely a hundred years ago that in the city of Edmonton the language of commerce was French. Not English but French. If you wanted to make a deal or buy, sell, or trade something, French was the language that that exchange more than likely would take place in.

Certainly, this bill is a recognition of the significant contributions that have been made by the Franco-Albertan community, and it is one of the many right steps that have been taken since the unfortunate Piquette affair, as I believe it was called. Hopefully, we will see at some point in the near future an initiative to put all the statutes that are the laws of this province in both official languages of this country.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Battle River-Wainwright.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is a pleasure to rise today to discuss Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007. Before all hon. members is an emblem that is truly indicative of the nature of shared cultural identities in this province.

There is no doubt that the francophone community has had a huge impact on Alberta's social development. As such, Albertans are fortunate to have francophone traditions, language, and culture that add yet another vibrant thread to the marvellous tapestry that is Alberta. Like the words "coulee," "butte," "portage," and "prairie," which have become synonymous with the cultural and geographic nature of this province, it is only natural to see the fleur-de-lys and the wild rose side by side on this striking visual reminder of what it means to be an Albertan.

Alberta's francophone community has indeed added a great deal to Alberta's culture and heritage. Of this there is no doubt. By that token, I strongly advocate for every other culture significant to Alberta's heritage to have the opportunity to recognize an emblem that commemorates their place in Alberta's shared identity. In order for that to occur, however, and in order for that to be done in as meaningful a fashion as possible, I believe that we need to use another venue.

Recently the hon. Minister for Tourism, Parks, Recreation and Culture has brought forward Bill 27, the Emblems of Alberta Amendment Act, 2007. Bill 27 amends the act by adding to section 1(b) the subclause (xii), "an Alberta symbol of distinction." In the bill an Alberta symbol of distinction is anything that symbolically represents or recognizes a cultural group that has committed to Alberta's culturally diverse landscape. For this I am truly thankful. This symbol is best situated under that upcoming statute, Mr. Speaker.

What I'm about to say is in no way a slight to the Franco-Albertan community as I fully recognize that the vast contributions made by this group have shaped this province in its multitude of successes. What I'm about to say is in no way a slight, especially given that this day marks the 20th anniversary of l'affaire Piquette, the incident in which a member of this Assembly, Leo Piquette, was forced to speak English in this Assembly.

As the hon. minister is bringing forward deeper, more meaningful, and more appropriate legislation, Mr. Speaker, to address this type of issue and as I understand that motions of this type are always in order, I humbly ask the understanding of this House and the Franco-Albertan community as I move that the motion for second reading of Bill 204, the Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007, be amended by deleting all words after "that" and substituting the following: "Bill 204, Emblems of Alberta (Franco-Albertan Recognition) Amendment Act, 2007, be not now read a second time but that it be read a second time this day six months hence."

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of our Franco-Albertan community and its heritage, and I ask all members to support the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: We'll just leave a moment for the pages to circulate the amendment.

Are there others who wish to speak to the amendment?

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak to the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Peace River.

Mr. Oberle: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise firstly to thank from the bottom of my heart all hon. members that participated in the debate and the tremendous support they've shown for this very important cause. This issue, the recognition of the Franco-Albertan flag, is one of great importance to me and my constituents. I have a significant francophone population in my constituency, and they're very supportive of this move. It's the recognition that's important, not the avenue by which we recognize it. I thank the hon. member for his motion. I agree with him that this is, in fact, the best

way to achieve this, through a government bill rather than private legislation, and I'm going to support the amendment.

Again I thank all hon. members for their participation and support. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is just, I guess, an exercise in futility. Why, in fact, did we even bring this bill forward if we were going to hoist it, which makes it disappear? It doesn't really defeat it. It just makes it come back in six months. I had suggested to one of my constituents that this could happen because they were concerned that they need to rally up support from other people to tell the government that they do in fact appreciate this recognition. I said that, well, the only way that this may be defeated is through a hoist or through it being defeated. By the way it was sounding with regard to all the accolades in support from all the various members, here we have a notice of amendment, and it looks like it's being hoisted.

If I can read the address of the member who did put this in, it's unfortunate. In fact, I'm disappointed, and I will not support the amendment then.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Certainly, it's surprising that we would be looking at suspending this bill, as I understand it, and perhaps – not necessarily but perhaps – bringing it back as a government bill, possibly in the fall.

An Hon. Member: The bill has been tabled already.

Mr. MacDonald: It's been tabled already, the hon. member tells me.

I think this is disrespectful of the whole process of private members' bills. It certainly is legislation that I think everyone should support, but I'm not convinced that we need to wait, and I would urge all hon. members to reject this notice of amendment. Let's vote on Bill 204 as it currently stands. I think we should pass this and get on with it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Strathcona.

Dr. Pannu: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak against the amendment to hoist the bill; that is, at least postpone discussion on the bill if not kill the bill for another six months. My constituents will be disappointed if the Legislature went that route.

I must share with the House, Mr. Speaker, the fact that I received some correspondence over the last few weeks from constituents. For one of them I read his letter carefully three or four times on Friday, as a matter of fact, not only hoping that there will be official recognition for a Franco-Albertan flag emblem but that there'll be an opportunity for that flag to be flown on the grounds of the Legislature. In fact, he sought my advice on how to make it a reality. As his MLA I am looking forward to meeting with him once we return from the break in the proceedings of the House next week.

4:00

He and other members of the Franco-Albertan community like him will be very disappointed if this House all of a sudden, after having spent several hours on debating this private member's bill, decided to drop the idea of any further discussion and coming towards a decision on this bill in this sitting. I think the bill needs

to be dealt with in this particular sitting of the House, the spring session of the House, and not be hoisted to be debated in some other session to follow six months from now or beyond.

So, Mr. Speaker, I very strongly express my reservations about this amendment and urge the House to defeat the motion. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Bonnyville-Cold Lake.

Mr. Ducharme: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As a Franco-Albertan and having had the opportunity of being the chair of the Francophone Secretariat, I cannot justifiably support this amendment, the reason being – and I think my comments have already been recorded in *Hansard* during second reading – that we've already recognized this flag since 1999. During Francophone Week we have the raising of the francophone flag right here in the rotunda. To me, to not go forward with this I think is a step backwards. As I indicated, I will not be supporting this amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others on the amendment? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's my great honour to rise again and speak against the amendment to Bill 204. I also have quite a number of the francophone community living in my constituency. I think they have great hope. They are expecting this bill to pass. Lots of my constituents approached me recently, and I said: whenever this bill comes into the Legislature, I'm going to support this. This is not fair if we don't deal with this bill today. I mean, this is a ridiculous idea to just postpone for six months or whatever.

I urge all the members sitting in this Assembly to reject this amendment, deal with Bill 204, and recognize the community. They deserve it. Thank you very much.

[The voice vote indicated that the motion on the amendment carried]

[Several members rose calling for a division. The division bell was rung at 4:04 p.m.]

[Ten minutes having elapsed, the Assembly divided]

[The Deputy Speaker in the chair]

For the motion:

Abbott	Fritz	Mar
Ady	Griffiths	Mitzel
Brown	Herard	Oberg
Cao	Horner	Oberle
Danyluk	Jablonski	Prins
DeLong	Johnson	Rogers
Dunford	Lindsay	Snelgrove
Evans	Lougheed	Stevens
Forsyth	Lund	VanderBurg

Against the motion:

Agnihotri	Flaherty	Miller, B.
Bonko	MacDonald	Pannu
Ducharme	Mather	Swann
Elsalhy		

Totals: For – 27 Against – 10

[Motion on the amendment to second reading of Bill 204 carried]

Bill 205
Environmental Protection and Enhancement
(Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Whitecourt-Ste. Anne.

Mr. VanderBurg: Good afternoon and thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's my pleasure to rise before this Assembly today and move second reading of Bill 205, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007, on behalf of the hon. Member for West Yellowhead.

In Alberta we have an economy that's resource based. Our communities, particularly in rural areas of this province, rely heavily on the extraction of resources to provide jobs for their citizens. The logging and energy industries are especially vital to maintaining Alberta's economy. Together the energy and forest industries employ 144,000 Albertans and contribute over 30 per cent of the province's gross domestic product.

The importance of these industries to the current prosperities that we enjoy in Alberta simply cannot be downplayed, Mr. Speaker. In addition to this, the energy and forestry industries are an important source of revenue for the government of Alberta. These industries contribute billions of dollars each year in royalties, stumpage fees, timber damage assessments to provincial coffers. As such, I believe that we have the duty to be accountable to the industries. Of course, this can never overshadow our responsibility to be accountable to the electors of Alberta.

Bill 205 is about ensuring long-term sustainability for the energy and forest industries. It's about making sure that Alberta's prosperity continues for many generations to come and that the energy and forest industries remain significant contributors to the provincial economy. This bill is also about responsible environmental stewardship. We can have all the economic success in the world, but it will not translate into a higher quality of life for Albertans if our environment is not properly managed.

Bill 205 takes a co-operative approach to sustainability, Mr. Speaker. Specifically, this bill will ensure that stakeholders in the energy and forest industries are brought together with representatives from the government on a consistent basis to review reclamation standards for land that has been utilized in the resource extraction.

Currently there is no legislation or regulation that stipulates how often a review of the reclamation criteria must be done. This means that the reviews may happen sporadically, at inconsistent intervals. It is simply not realistic to assume that we have sound land management practices if reviews of policies are not conducted in a regular and timely fashion.

Under the provisions of this bill a review of reclamation standards will take place every five years. I believe that this is an appropriate timeline because it will allow for reclamation standards to be properly implemented. After five years stakeholders should have a good grasp of the strengths and weaknesses of the standards. They will then be able to voice any concerns they might have in a review process. As a government we can then react to stakeholder input to implement new criteria for reclamation.

4:20

Another advantage of the mandatory review after five years, Mr. Speaker, is that it will allow for reclamation standards to take into account current technology and processes. Technology in the area of environmental management is something that is constantly evolving. Scientists here in Alberta and around the world are continually developing new methods of maximizing the potential of our land base and preserving it for future generations to enjoy. Bill 205 will make sure that these new technologies are taken into

account by making it mandatory for the best management practices in the forest sector to be incorporated into reclamation standards. Technology is not the only thing in the world that's perpetually evolving. Economic conditions, environmental conditions, and public expectations are also in a constant state of flux. As legislators it is incumbent upon us to develop legislation that can adapt to these rapidly changing conditions.

I think that the strengths of Bill 205 are that it's, in essence, about being adaptable, responsive, and flexible. The bill's ability to adapt, as I have already alluded to, stems from the fact that it allows for re-evaluation of conditions every five years. It's about being responsible because it ensures that the views of stakeholders are taken into account, and it's about being flexible because it encourages a process of consultation and consensus rather than the government imposing conditions on industry.

I'm going to emphasize the co-operative and consultative nature of this legislation, Mr. Speaker, by taking a couple of minutes to fill this Assembly in on some of the steps that were taken in the development of this legislation. First, the member contacted the departments of Environment, Energy, and Sustainable Resource Development to learn about the current regulations that are in place, the review processes, and the future directions that each department is taking with regard to well site reclamation criteria.

Next, the member liaised with various stakeholders' groups to determine their needs. These groups included the Alberta Forest Products Association, the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers, and the Alberta Newsprint Company, located in Whitecourt-Ste. Anne. Finally, the member consulted with government departments to determine how the needs of the stakeholders might be incorporated into the way in which we review reclamation criteria in this province. This approach emphasizes an overarching intent of the legislation. The legislation aims to bring government and industry together in a co-operative and timely fashion to develop reclamation criteria. By doing this, we can ensure that the needs of Albertans are met.

Both government and industry bring a unique perspective to this issue. On one hand, industry has a great deal of insight into the standards and practices that are applicable to the industry and also specific needs of the companies operating within the industry. On the other hand, government is responsible for providing overall policy guidelines in areas surrounding environmental stewardship and land-use planning. By combining these two perspectives, the energy and forest industries can work together with government to ensure economic vitality and environmental sustainability for Albertans for many years to come.

Mr. Speaker, industry consultation is not something new to Alberta. Several government departments, including Sustainable Resource Development, Energy, and Environment, already work together with stakeholders to formulate policy. We have a host of committees in this province that work to make recommendations that will promote responsible development and resource management.

Bill 205 does call for the formation of another committee, a seven-person committee mandated to review reclamation standards for well sites. However, Bill 205 will also help to ensure that recommendations of this committee receive due consideration by the minister in a timely fashion. Specifically, the bill stipulates that the committee must report to the minister six months after commencing a review. This condition will help to give guidance to the committee members and provide clear expectations of timelines for the review process. The bill also stipulates that upon receiving the committee's recommendations, the minister must make a public response within three months. I trust that our hon. ministers always strive to do what's best for Albertans, Mr. Speaker, but with many competing priorities

that a minister must deal with, it can take time before reports are addressed. Requiring a public response by the minister within three months will ensure that these issues are addressed in a timely fashion.

Another advantage of regular consultation and review is that it allows opportunity for public input. Representing the interests of Albertans is the primary responsibility of this government, and the process of governance is greatly enhanced if the people are given a regular opportunity to have input into government policy. Recently Alberta Newsprint Company and the Alberta Forest Products Association expressed their support for the initiatives proposed by Bill 205. These companies acknowledge the importance of reviewing the regulations and supported the goal of increasing communication between the forest and energy sectors. These organizations recognize that the act's initiatives will improve the overall state of forestry in Alberta.

While the final details of the consultation process still need to be worked out through regulation, we can be assured that as with any other review process here in Alberta there will be more, ample opportunity for the public to comment. Moreover, consistent reviews could facilitate public input by bringing increased attention to the issues surrounding well site reclamation. By combining the perspectives of industry, government, and the public, we can ensure that the public policy reflects the interests of all those who have the privilege of living in this great province, Mr. Speaker.

In the spirit of co-operation and consultation, that the Member for West Yellowhead has emphasized, I believe that Bill 205 in the hands of my esteemed colleagues . . . [Mr. VanderBurg's speaking time expired]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Mountain View, followed by the hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmar.

Dr. Swann: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to rise on Bill 205, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007, a very important issue for Albertans as we go through the most rapid growth in our history. It's my understanding that this amendment refers only to green areas. If that is the case, it's inexplicable to me why we wouldn't be including other areas. If I'm wrong about that, I would be very pleased to be corrected, and maybe that can come out further in some of the discussions.

There's a clear need to review our reclamation/remediation process not only from the point of view of the science and the capacity of the various respective departments – Environment, SRD, and Energy – to review what's being done on the ground and the quality of the reclamation and remediation but also from the point of view of liability and how our growing liability as citizens of this province has not been addressed. So I acknowledge and commend the member for bringing forward this important initiative to review periodically what we're doing, where we're going, and how we're dealing with the vital responsibility of reclaiming and, ultimately, assessing the quality of the soil, whether it's oil and gas or forestry or gravel or whatever is being addressed here.

Clearly, in the interests of the long term we need to have a better plan in place for where and what we develop on these landscapes. Again, we're looking for signs that this government is going to eventually come up with a land-use framework and a land-use plan that establishes real priorities for our watershed, for our agriculture, for residential development, for industry, and so on. We're also looking for a commitment to science in the first instance before approving such projects but certainly following the completion of a project and its reclamation and remediation. There's a sense that

because of underfunding and because of other priorities, this government has not invested in independent scientific assessment both before and after these sites have been developed.

4:30

So, thirdly, we're also looking for evidence that the public has meaningful input into how we're developing, the pace we're developing, and the degree to which we are attending to the quality of equivalent land use, which is the commitment under the Environmental Protection and Enhancement Act, to return the land to equivalent land use. There are serious questions, particularly in the oil sands area, about whether this is even a consideration any longer. So a vitally important piece of legislation.

I guess that from the point of view of having some feedback, I would say that Albertans want to know that not only is a site being reclaimed, but it's being reclaimed in a timely fashion up to a standard that is independently assessed, again. The timely fashion is one that has not been addressed in much of the legislation to date, and I'm very hopeful that with this kind of a review we would also see some attention given to what it means for a timely reclamation.

Another dimension of this is an independent assessment. By that I mean that given that Alberta Environment doesn't necessarily have the experts it needs to do all of these assessments in soil remediation, they invest the dollars and hire independent consultants that will act and speak on behalf of the public interest. We know that industry has its consultants, and we get repeated reports from industry before and after development that everything is fine. But what the public needs to know is that we have independent consultants giving us reassurances that not only is the quality of the reclamation being done, but the verification of standards has been met.

It's clear from Alberta Environment's own department that only 1 in 10 of such sites is inspected, and even of those many are not actually sampled; soil samples are not taken. So there's a tremendous amount of faith, shall I say, placed in the companies, the corporations, and their consultants that everything has been done in terms of inspection and enforcement of what are reasonable guidelines but are very suspect in terms of their enforcement because of either, again, lack of resources or lack of expertise in this department.

The other issue that has more to do with liability and I hope will also be addressed at some level with this new department would be the continuing need for an orphan fund for downstream oil and gas particularly. We have an upstream oil and gas orphan fund, and the previous Minister of Environment committed to establishing a downstream oil and gas orphan fund. It continues to languish in space as there's been no further discussion, no further commitment, no attempt to do anything but leave it to the public purse to clean up the downstream sites that have been abandoned by companies that can no longer function or that choose to walk away.

There is concern, then, about the growing public liability, whether we're talking about oil sands or refinery sites, and I think the public deserves to have this kind of review. I have to acknowledge the government for its willingness to set up all-party policy review. That is progress. Indeed, this government is taking some constructive steps towards real democratic renewal, I would say, on some of these all-party committees, and I applaud that.

This review of the legislation is an important step, one that one can only support in terms of its regular return to the Legislature for review. This is the issue for the 21st century: how we are managing our environment, how we are reclaiming our environment, and whether we indeed are committed to sustainable development as opposed to a quick return on investment, driven by a very hot market in Alberta.

So with those provisos and those concerns I'll take my seat and welcome further discussion and debate, with, I hope, a clarification on why we're simply restricting this review to the green areas and not including the white areas of this province as well on this regular review.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Drayton Valley-Calmor, followed by the hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Rev. Abbott: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to have the opportunity to continue debate on Bill 205, the Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007. I want to thank the hon. Member for West Yellowhead for bringing this legislation forward.

Mr. Speaker, I think we all understand the importance of natural resources to our province. This year nonrenewable resource revenue will make up about \$11.6 billion of the provincial budget.

An Hon. Member: How much?

Rev. Abbott: Eleven point six billion.

The energy and forestry sector employs 143,400 people. It is a big industry, and as such there is a need to manage the impacts of natural resource development. Bill 205 will address concerns relating to well-site reclamation by putting in place clear environmental and forest management procedures. It will also allow reclamation guidelines to be reviewed every five years. Now, both elements of the bill, consistent reclamation guidelines and periodic review of regulations, are critical elements for an industry that relies on clear direction from government and strives to leave forests and natural areas in pristine condition for all Albertans to enjoy.

Mr. Speaker, it is the approach of this government to balance the competing needs arising from oil and gas exploration and forest development along with other economic and social demands. Balancing demands is part of managing the growth pressures that our province currently faces. That's why the hon. Minister of Energy is in the process of developing a comprehensive energy strategy and why the hon. Minister of Sustainable Resource Development is completing work on a land-use framework. Bill 205 falls in the mould of these initiatives by ensuring that a more consistent process is in place to protect forests and the environment.

As it stands, Alberta's timber resources are governed by forest management agreements, or FMAs. FMAs allow forestry companies the right to grow, harvest, and remove timber. FMAs also lay out the rules and responsibilities for forestry companies in the area they will be harvesting. As FMAs capture vast areas of the province, the oil and gas development often occurs within areas covered by FMAs. This can impact the land base surrounding and leading up to oil and gas well sites. It impacts the harvest of timber and can displace topsoil.

When a well site is abandoned, the site must be reclaimed. Generally speaking, reclamation involves returning the area around the well site back to its original state. This process is laid out in a document called Reclamation Criteria for Wellsites and Associated Facilities. This document was last updated in 1995. It's pretty tough to replant 40- or 50-year old trees to make a site "original," Mr. Speaker. Now, I do not want the Assembly to believe that I view this fact in a negative light. I don't. However, this underlines the importance of relevant and current environmental and forest management procedures. Bill 205 would allow for the regular update of reclamation criteria by putting it on a timeline for review every five years.

There are a couple of reasons why this new, consistent process is of benefit to the province of Alberta. Regular reviews will assure that the most up-to-date procedures will be included as part of the environment management and reclamation process. Mr. Speaker, this is critical as changes to technology and advances in science allow for new approaches to be taken towards reclaiming sites. Alberta has significant research activities occurring both in universities and in private labs. It is important that as researchers and scientists make new discoveries pertaining to forests and natural habitat, such discoveries are reflected in our reclamation policies. Now, in regularly considering new approaches in technologies, we are assuring that industry is using or bringing to the table the most appropriate and innovative ways to preserve Alberta's natural capital.

Mr. Speaker, the reclamation policies of 1995 are not the same as the realities of 2007, nor will the realities of 2007 match the demands of 2010 or perhaps 2015 and beyond. This bill is about making sure that forestry and energy industries have a clear and consistent understanding of what is expected of them. Government should facilitate the process of ensuring that guidelines match present-day realities and expectations that Albertans hold.

4:40

While clear reclamation procedures are one aspect of the bill, another is maintaining the long-term health and productivity of the forest. Part of the challenge facing forestry companies at the moment is that when oil and gas companies are reclaiming sites, they plant perennial grasses as a way to return the site to a form of natural habitat. Now, this practice does also help to prevent erosion, and while the intent of this process is environmentally sound, the planting of such grasses does not allow for the re-establishment of the forest. This is obviously the expectation of a holder of a forest management agreement, or an FMA. However, this is not reflected in current reclamation practices, Mr. Speaker.

Perhaps through regular review of reclamation policies the forestry industry would have the opportunity to make a case for an improved approach with the energy industry towards reforestation. This is one example, but generally speaking there's a lack of opportunities for industry, regulators, and other interested parties to work towards relevant management procedures and policies.

Mr. Speaker, there is another component to maintaining healthy forests: it depends on an update of the reclamation criteria. You see, our province's timber damage assessment policy was also put in place in 1995, after consultations with relevant groups. This policy is in place to compensate the government of Alberta and FMA holders for any damages resulting to timber from industrial developments such as oil and gas drilling. As hon. members can observe, some of the challenges with both the reclamation policy and the timber damage assessment are interconnected. Again, this underlines the need for periodic review of reclamation and forest management policies.

Albertans take a significant amount of pride in the fact that our province has such bountiful resources. Albertans also recognize the importance of preserving the natural capital while natural resources are developed. It lives up to this government's commitment to manage growth pressures by facilitating improved environmental processes and allowing for continued economic prosperity.

Bill 205 will make sure that there is a consistent process in place to make sure that well-site reclamation policies are current and reflect new approaches and technologies. It will make sure that reviews happen every five years, so industry has clear direction on what the policies are, how policy will be reviewed, and when it will be implemented.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, Bill 205 ensures that Alberta's forests are protected for the long term. It is our fourth largest industry, and it has significant economic impact on numerous Alberta communities, including Drayton Valley. We cannot afford to wait to bring in an updated and clarified approach to forest management. This is why we must put in place consistent and clear policies to allow this industry to continue to make strong economic contributions to our province.

Mr. Speaker, I will be supporting this bill, and I encourage all my hon. colleagues to do the same. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

Mr. Bonko: 29(2)(a)?

The Deputy Speaker: Not on private members' bills.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again and speak to Bill 205, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007. Bill 205 mainly has two objectives. The purpose of the bill is to add a provision under section 137 of the EPEA to deal specifically with the review of all regulations and practices for conservation and reclamation in the green area of the province. The first part defines specified land for the sole purpose of this section as being exclusively in the green area of the province.

The second purpose of the bill is to legislate the creation of a committee of seven people who will be tasked with the review of any regulation made governing the practices and criteria for conservation and reclamation of specified land, that being the green area. This committee will have several objectives, including ensuring that the regulations incorporate best forest management practices for land reclamation as well as providing reporting timelines and public disclosure requirements.

Mr. Speaker, as well, there is also the provision that the committee will report to the Legislative Assembly if it is sitting or, if it's not sitting, within 15 days of the next sitting. The impact of this bill will provide the ability under EPEA to review legislation that concerns conservation and reclamation in the green area of the province. This amendment provides the mechanism for the review of regulations and codes of practice that ensures best available practices for land in the green area to be reclaimed. The committee that would be struck would have mandated free reporting functions to the public and to the Legislative Assembly.

The outcome of this bill would be to ensure that there are some oversight and review and regulations to guide reclamation activities in the green area. The committee as appointed by the minister is mandated to review the legislation every five years to ensure best forest management practices for reclamation. This is a good amendment to make as it would force the government to incorporate best available practices into its forest management codes of practice for all operators in the green areas.

One area where perhaps this bill could be more aggressive is an amendment to section 137.1(7), that mandates that the minister must make the report public within three months after the date on which it is received. This government has a habit of receiving reports and then sitting on them for a long period of time, such as the Affordable Housing Task Force report. There can be an argument to be made that the initial draft recommendations should be made public immediately and that the government responds in a shorter time frame than three months. That way everyone could see what the initial recommendations are and compare that to the government's accepted response. This would ensure that the government is held

accountable for any negative changes to the committee's recommendations.

Mr. Speaker, I'm supporting this bill, the rationale. This act forces oversight of ministerial actions when dealing with the reclamation and conservation on green land. Any regulation the minister makes regarding that reclamation and conservation will be scrutinized and analyzed to see if they fit best forestry practices. It provides a means for reporting the findings to both the minister and the Legislative Assembly. Any step that is taken to review existing legislation to ensure that best available practices are always used in forestry management by all operators is a good step. This bill provides that type of oversight on an ongoing basis and also ensures that the findings are made public and are reported to the Legislative Assembly instead of remaining strictly in the purview of the minister. This is a step towards accountability.

Any attempt to review existing legislation to ensure that the best available practices are adhered to and are required by legislation and codes of practice is a good step. Alberta values our forests, and any step to ensure best available forest management practices to preserve this resource and develop it responsibly is a positive step. This government should have these types of committees in place to review all codes of practice and legislation that deal with reclamation activities by industry to ensure that best available practices are used. As well, similar provisions should be incorporated into EPEA to deal with oil and gas activities in the white areas of the province. This would allow for the committee to ensure that best practices are used across all sectors to reclaim land after resources have been extracted. Our land belongs to all Albertans, and thus government policy should ensure at all times that industry that operates on our land base returns the land to the state it was prior to resource extraction by using best available practices and technology.

The Member for West Yellowhead should be applauded for bringing forth this bill that aims to strengthen legislation around conservation and reclamation and especially for putting such a review in the public domain. This is a good step towards transparency and accountability. I urge all the members of the Assembly to support Bill 205. Thank you very much.

4:50

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Thank you. There are just a couple of minutes left, Mr. Speaker, I believe. Who would not be for Bill 205? You know, a review is conducted every five years. Land reclamations under the act are conducted through best forestry practices. If that's what happens, who could be against it? It recommends changes to the regulations for the implementation of the best practices, the committee reports within six months of the reviews, and the minister makes a public response within six months. Well, who possibly could be against this in terms of our green areas and the reclamation areas? So, certainly, I don't think there would be any problem in this Assembly supporting Bill 205. I would be very surprised if that was the case.

But I just want to quickly say, though, Mr. Speaker, that it comes again to the pace of development, even in the green areas. The Member for Calgary-Mountain View talked about land reclamation generally. He also is correct that we hope that the people that we have on board here are actually experts and are independent when they're brought forward.

Again, I come back. The pace of development is so rapid in this province, and bills like this talk about five years after the fact, Mr. Speaker. With what's going on with the economy and how quickly

we're, you know, getting oil and gas out, how quickly the tar sands and the rest of it, even in our green areas this is going to put pressure on. Until we begin to deal with the pace of development, frankly, these things will be largely irrelevant. The bill in itself, as I say, we'll certainly support. But five years down of reclamation – the way we're going right now, what's going to be left? I venture there'll be encroachments. I can predict it. In our green areas it's already starting.

As I say, you know, if the bill goes forward, as I expect it will, and we do the right things in terms of the people that are going on the committees, that they are actual experts, certainly, we will support the bill. I just honestly say, Mr. Speaker, that we're facing all sorts of problems with the rate of development. We know that it's happening in housing. We've had this discussion with health care, education, you name it, the environment. We had the previous debate on Bill 3. It's nice to pass bills in the Legislature, Mr. Speaker, even a good bill, possibly a good bill, but the rate of development.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Decore.

Mr. Bonko: Well, thanks, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise on Bill 205, Environmental Protection and Enhancement (Conservation and Reclamation) Amendment Act, 2007. It does ask or beg the question because it does specifically talk about green areas. Now, some of our green areas at this point in time are considered to be protected, but does this open up the provision or tell us that everything's available for development as long as it can be brought back with conservation and reclamation? We have some pristine areas, which were mentioned by the Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie.

The Deputy Speaker: I hesitate to cut the member off, but at 4:55 we have to switch to Motions Other than Government Motions. So the time has elapsed.

head: **Motions Other than Government Motions**

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner.

Distribution of Budget Surplus

504. Mr. Hinman moved:

Be it resolved that the Legislative Assembly urge the government to consider the advisability of investing 50 per cent of the budget surplus into the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and reimbursing the remaining 50 per cent to Albertans as a percentage of their personal income taxes and/or property taxes.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It's a real privilege today to rise and to speak on Motion 504 and to urge this government to take up a new direction that will benefit the people, the families, and the communities of Alberta. We really want to leap forward here, and we have a great opportunity with the surplus budgets that have been coming in and the enormous resources that we have been able to gather in the last few years.

But as we discussed in opposition on what would be the most important motion that we could bring forward, we really focused on families, we focused on communities and thought: what could the government do that would make the biggest difference in the shortest time for the long term? So we thought about it. "Well, let's treat this like our own family business. What would we do?" If you had vast amounts of nonrenewable resources coming into your

business, as we do now, you would sit down and you'd think: well, we want to pass on the family business; we want to pass this on to the next generation, to our family. But the current situation is such that if we were to continue spending and build a business that isn't economically viable without this income, that's not guaranteed, we'd put the next generation in jeopardy.

The basic purpose of this motion is to look at the next generation and what we do. So for that what we want to do is to be able to put 50 per cent of all surplus income into the heritage trust fund, and the other 50 per cent would be returned to the actual taxpayers of Alberta via a system where they'd have a refund on their personal income tax or their property tax. This would help them at that time to strengthen them and to put them in a position where they can plan and will plan for their future.

But too often human nature is that when we have a windfall, blessed with extra cash, we have the urge to go out and spend it, to take advantage, and to improve our quality of life. I'll use the example if you're running a small corporation and you happen to have a plane, you might think, "Wow. You know, we have a great income here. We could afford a Learjet and go out and purchase one," not looking at the cost and the expenses down the road and therefore put the business in jeopardy as soon as the income is reduced. It's not sustainable, and it didn't bring any real advantage to the corporation or to the province here.

Good financial planners always say that saving is a discipline and a necessary action that one should do throughout one's life, especially in the tough times. That's where you develop the discipline to put away and to, as we say here in Alberta, save for a rainy day. It's critical that we do that. As a government we should be saving a good portion of our surplus dollars, but we should also be saving a portion of our regular income.

Lessons on money management also say that when you all of a sudden have a major influx or a boost in your salary, you should keep your lifestyle the way it was when you first got the raise. Too often as soon as we get a raise or this boost in income, we run out and say: we can afford a better vehicle; we can afford a bigger house. But they always recommend that you continue your current lifestyle, continue your current programs and use some fiscal prudence in how you're going to plan and what you're going to do for the future.

So in the same regard as the province we need to look at capping our spending to that of inflation and growth and not every time we have an increase in income to just run out and say: "Well, what new program can we develop? Where can we spend some extra money?" and to have a slush fund that we can go out and quickly adapt and use.

5:00

A legacy, Mr. Speaker, is something that is not easily attained and not always done intentionally. It's where an individual, a family, or in this case a government can and will produce a legacy if, in fact, we're looking far enough into the future and thinking of those that are coming behind us. The Manning government understood the importance that fresh water had for the resources here in Alberta. He built dams and storage facilities and canals and had programs planned way back in the '50s and '60s. He wasn't thinking of that time; he was looking at the future. So even when we have tough years down in the south, maybe one or two back-to-back years, we still have been blessed with a good reserve of water that has bridged us through it.

The same is true financially. If we don't look to the future, it will be too late when all of a sudden we hit the bad years. We just have to go back a few short years, less than 20, to realize that the

spending and the boom and then the bust that we went through will happen again. History has a way of repeating itself over and over again. So we want to take that and ensure that we put it into a savings account to benefit the people.

The other part of this bill, of course, is the 50 per cent to return to the taxpayers of Alberta. This is critical. Government is just the collective wisdom of those of us that form that government. Too often, if we don't look at the big picture and we look at the selfish picture, we get ourselves into problems. Currently, we're living in a paradigm where bigger is better, more taxes are better, more spending and more programs and more handouts are the benefit of society. We're having more and more people become dependent on government handouts and thinking that they will always be there, but it isn't going to be so.

If we are to look at Canada as a whole and the importance of a strong economic country, we realize that there are 10 first ministers, a Prime Minister, and we could compare it to a team. How are we going to strengthen Canada, go forward, and have a strong team so that we can and will compete internationally and not just say, "Oh, things are fine here at home"? We do have to compete on an international basis; we're an export nation. The cost of production and those things that happen here in the country and the cost of our taxes definitely put us at a disadvantage if we're not in sync. Our closest partner to the south definitely has a more competitive tax regime than we do here, and they return the dollars to the people, which does help the entrepreneurs.

It's important, Mr. Speaker, that we need to look at the big picture. We want to be effective. We want to boost our economy. We want to make sure that it's sustainable. The question is: how are we going to do that? I go back to that we need to cap our spending. We need to realize that there is a growth factor. There is inflation, but we need to cap it. We need to reduce some of our taxes. We could lead the country, and the Prime Minister could point to Alberta and say, "Look at them: they've eliminated health care premiums," rather than pointing and saying, "This is the province that has them, and the other ones are following us." They could say, as they can now, "Look at our basic tax exemption," and they can raise it to the \$15,000. There are many areas where we can and we should lead here in to the province of Alberta.

Mr. Speaker, how much time do I have left, if I could ask?

The Deputy Speaker: Three minutes.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you.

An Hon. Member: You go.

Mr. Hinman: No, I'm going to stay three more minutes.

Anyway, it's important that we take the attitude that we're going to lead here in Canada, that we're going to be the star, and that we're going to look at what is good government, what is good policy, and we're going to provide that for the people of Alberta. We don't want them to have to struggle through like we have in the last 15 years of paying off a debt, not committing to build the proper infrastructure. The way to do that is to have good fiscal management now.

I've always loved the historian Alexander Tytler and how he declared that democracy was doomed to fail and that it was due to loose fiscal policy. He said that the people will vote for the party that will promise to give them the most out of the public treasury. It doesn't do us any good to be competing or saying that we will take from one area and have the idea of divide and conquer and give to another area. It doesn't help the west when the Prime Minister does

that, and it doesn't help the province if we pit north against south or rural against urban.

What we need to do is reduce the taxes. We need to be able to have a dividend system that goes back, that allows for fiscal responsibility of local government. We need to take on the idea that we are going to save, we're going to prepare for the future, and we're going to do what's right. We're going to put the people of Alberta first and realize that we need to put our future generations first, that we won't live an exuberant lifestyle and that we won't spend and grow government for our own purposes, that we'll always look to the future. In doing that, we need to remember that we need to save – save is a critical point – that we need to return to those people that have overpaid, that when we have a surplus, Mr. Speaker, it's no different than going to the grocery store and handing them a twenty only to hear: oh, we don't give change here. We have a surplus, and we should have legislation that tells us what we're going to do with that surplus so it isn't wasted away.

I invite the members of this Legislature to make history again, a great history, a legacy, one that ensures freedom, peace, and prosperity. We must save our surplus dollars, and we must return our surplus dollars to those that have paid them.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat.

Mr. Mitzel: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am pleased to join the debate on Motion 504, which proposes to invest 50 per cent of the budget surplus in the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and reimburse the remaining 50 per cent to Albertans as a percentage of their personal income taxes and/or property taxes. Motion 504 does not provide a stable, long-term plan for Alberta's surplus funds. Alberta's surplus should be managed to benefit all Albertans now and in the future, not only those Albertans who qualify to benefit from it in years when Alberta produces a budgetary surplus.

With regard to long-term planning, Premier Stelmach has mandated the Minister of Finance to establish a financial investment and planning commission to explore options for long-term investment strategies for Alberta's nonrenewable resource revenues. The Minister of Finance has pledged to include a surplus formula in the 2007 budget. Premier Stelmach set out five priorities for the Alberta government . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Hon. member, the mentioning of names is not allowed in the Assembly.

Mr. Mitzel: I apologize.

Our Premier has set out five priorities for the Alberta government, which reflect the values and priorities of Albertans. Of these five priorities three are directly related to purposeful and responsible spending. They are: to manage growth pressures, to improve Albertans' quality of life, and to build a stronger Alberta. Long-term planning for Alberta's budget surplus will help to safeguard the province against future economic shortfalls and will ensure that the priorities of this government are achieved.

With regard to the Alberta heritage savings trust fund, the fund was created to provide prudent stewardship and the greatest financial returns from nonrenewable resources for current and future generations. Over its history the fund has supported ongoing government programs and tax reductions, established endowments, and paid for capital improvements throughout the province. In 1996 the mandate of the Alberta heritage savings trust fund was reviewed. A new business plan was implemented, which included increasing long-term investments. In March 2003 a survey was conducted which

found that the majority of Albertans wanted the fund to continue to operate as it was.

With regard to the Financial Management Commission, Mr. Speaker, on July 8, 2002, the commission issued its recommendations to the government on how to make certain that Alberta remained a leader in fiscal planning by ensuring long-term fiscal sustainability. One of the key recommendations was the establishment of a sustainability fund as part of the renewed heritage fund, that would be used to stabilize volatile resource revenue. The fund could be drawn on during times of low resource revenues by transferring sufficient amounts to the general revenue fund to cover any deficiency of revenues over expenditures.

Mr. Speaker, the government of Alberta has heard from the Calgary Chamber of Commerce, the Alberta Chambers of Commerce, and the Certified General Accountants Association of Alberta regarding sustainable management of windfall resource revenues. Their ideas support the government's current direction. The Calgary Chamber of Commerce has recommended that the provincial government commit to the principle of sustainability when identifying and assessing spending priorities. In fact, the Calgary Chamber of Commerce believes that the prudent handling of nonrenewable resource revenues will sustain the Alberta advantage and allow the province to maintain its competitive tax base and to make sustainable investments in education and research.

5:10

Albertans experience long-term benefits through spending on capital projects in budgetary surplus years. Alberta's capital account was created in 2003 as part of the new fiscal framework established to help address immediate and long-term infrastructure needs in Alberta.

The 2006 to 2009 capital plan directly supports \$13.3 billion in capital projects. Mr. Speaker, this is a 45 per cent, or \$4.1 billion, increase from the 2005 to 2008 capital plan published in Budget 2005. This degree of capital support is unmatched in the rest of Canada. Alberta's capital spending on infrastructure is three times the average of other provinces. In 2006-2007 Alberta will spend \$4.2 billion on capital projects, or about \$1,300 per person. The average per capita spending on infrastructure in other provinces has been about \$400 per person. Last year a major increase was provided for municipal infrastructure, including the five-year, \$3 billion Alberta municipal infrastructure program. In Budget 2006 major increases have been provided for the provincial highway network and health, school, and postsecondary facilities.

Mr. Speaker, giving back 50 per cent of the budget surplus funds to a portion of Albertans through personal income taxes and/or property taxes will not benefit all Albertans who currently live in this province or who will live here in the future. In its 2007 fiscal performance index, the Fraser Institute recognizes Alberta as having one of the most competitive taxation systems in the country with the lowest personal and corporate income taxes and no capital taxes. This province has a competitive taxation system because of the responsible allocation of nonrenewable resource surplus windfalls, which may not produce a budget surplus every year.

Alberta has also allocated more money to capital projects due to the current economic climate. Alberta's prosperity should be utilized to benefit everyone in the current population as well as its future population. It should be a thriving and successful province for those who are not yet born and for those who choose to move to our great province.

I cannot support Motion 504, however well-intended, and I'll ask my colleagues to not support this motion. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar.

Mr. MacDonald: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It's a pleasure to get to participate in the debate on Motion 504 this afternoon. Motion 504 proposes that the government allocate half of the surplus into the heritage fund and the other half into personal or property tax cuts.

Certainly, at some point in the future I would like to think that we will have the financial ability to put 50 per cent of our surplus into the heritage savings trust fund and reduce personal income taxes and/or property taxes and/or corporate taxes. I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview is going to have something to say about that, but tax reduction is a very, very good thing. Now, this, of course, would occur after we eliminate health care premiums for all Albertans.

The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner is perhaps a visionary here with his idea that we would have 50 per cent of the budget surplus for the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and a whole series of tax cuts that we could pass in this Legislative Assembly for the benefit of Albertans.

Hopefully we'll get to that some day, but in the meantime I think we should adopt as a surplus policy the policy from 2004 that the Alberta Liberal party campaigned on in the last election, the one that was so well received by so many voters. We certainly did have a plan. The voters sensed that we had a plan. They didn't know until two years later, when the Premier finally just flat out admitted it, that, no, there was no plan by the Conservatives. I think that with this motion the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner certainly realizes something that many people already knew in 2004, and that's that this government had no plan. Unfortunately, they still do not have a plan. They have five vague pillars there that they talk about, but certainly the one on openness and transparency was exposed for what it was this afternoon: a very narrow pillar that perhaps is made out of plastic that loses its strength in the sunlight and collapses. With the spring here it's not long before that pillar is going to completely collapse.

Now, our surplus plan, Mr. Speaker, called for 35 per cent of surplus money to be into the heritage fund immediately, and no one can tell me that this government has managed over the last number of years the Alberta heritage savings trust fund in a prudent and wise way. It hasn't even grown and met the demands of inflation over the years. I know that the hon. Member for Rocky Mountain House is shaking his head there, but it's true. It certainly is true.

Also, we would like to see, Mr. Speaker, 35 per cent of the surplus invested in a postsecondary endowment fund. We would like to see 25 per cent in a capital account towards eliminating Alberta's infrastructure deficit, and this is a deficit that's growing and growing. Why? Because this Conservative government was operating for years without a plan. Without a blueprint you don't build anything because it costs more and more money.

Now, it is interesting to note that we would also like to have a \$500 million arts endowment fund for the humanities, social sciences, and arts. Of course, the \$500 million would be capped. It's interesting also to note that it is only now that the Progressive Conservatives are talking about a surplus policy, but it's too late. It's too late because it's costing us so much extra, and that's evident again in media reports that were issued today.

When we talk about what the Conservatives are suggesting, we have to look at some of the shortcomings in this, Mr. Speaker. First, governments can reduce the size of surpluses by increasing annual spending. Alberta has a real problem with this, and I'm going to be very anxious to see what this budget is on Thursday. I don't know if the President of the Treasury Board is going to look up from his

notes when this budget is being delivered or not. I'm sure he's going to feel guilty that the spending increases are going to be so significant, and he thought: well, we can reduce the size of government, and we could manage our dollars more efficiently. I don't know how he's going to react to this budget on Thursday, but I have a close seat here, and I'm going to be watching with interest to see what expressions he gives as this budget is outlined. Now, last year's total expenses increased 12 per cent from the year before that. In that year there was another significant increase of 11 per cent, and this outpaces the combined inflation and population growth rate.

Second, this government is famous for this spending off budget. Now, a recent report by the C.D. Howe Institute noted that Alberta had the worst record for overspending its budget, and in 10 years – in 10 years – the budget in this province has increased by over 120 per cent. We've still got a lot of potholes to fix, we've got a lot of bridges and roads and schools to build, hospitals to build, but the cost of this now.

The Alberta Liberals tabled Bill 201, Funding Alberta's Future Act. Now, our idea for long-term financial security for Alberta is the same as any prudent householder: pay yourself first. Bill 201 would have provided world-class public services, an outstanding postsecondary education system, and permanently competitive taxes. That's our fiscal policy, and Motion 504 would be an additional step at some time in the future, Mr. Speaker. I would urge the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner and all others to have a second look at the ideas coming from this particular party.

5:20

In addition to those ideas of the Alberta Liberal caucus – and the policy to invest 30 per cent off the top of any year-end surplus directly into the heritage fund is a sound and a good idea. I can't believe that members would talk about the heritage savings trust fund and not contemplate supporting that idea. If we build up the heritage fund, Albertans will be in a position to permanently enjoy the most competitive tax regime in North America. We are slipping here.

Now, the province of British Columbia has in some cases a much more competitive tax structure than we do. Again, we are still waiting for leadership and direction from this government. It's a tired government. That certainly is true. It's a tired and listless government, and it's drifting. [interjection] It certainly is. The hon. member says that it's not true. One only has to visit the city of Fort McMurray to realize how tired and drifting and listless this government really is.

Speaker's Ruling Decorum

The Deputy Speaker: I would like to remind the hon. Minister of International, Intergovernmental and Aboriginal Relations that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar has the floor, and I would be happy to recognize the hon. minister at some point in the future.

I would also like to remind the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar that perhaps if you address the Speaker with your comments instead of the members opposite, it would be less provocative.

Mr. MacDonald: Yes, Mr. Speaker. You're absolutely right. I must admit that I was provoked.

Debate Continued

Mr. MacDonald: Now, Mr. Speaker, if we had a heritage fund that was growing, growing substantially to the point where we could have over a hundred billion dollars by 2021 in that fund, that would be a great addition for this province.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Mr. Martin: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I give the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner credit for bringing this motion forward because it's a major debate about some of the big issues, whether we agree with them or not. It seems to me that this is precisely the type of big debate we need, you know, within the province. As already mentioned, the member is talking about surplus money, 50 per cent going into the heritage trust fund and 50 per cent into what I think he would call a tax refund. I want to make sure I get the term right.

Mr. Speaker, the NDP has no great objection to putting more money at surplus times into the heritage trust fund. We've called for that before. But I want to remind people that we have different sorts of deficits that we forgot about in the mid-90s. Yes, we had the deficit in terms of the economic deficit, but then we forgot about the social deficit and the infrastructure deficit. Now we're trying to play catch-up in an overheated economy. So the problem that I have in saying 50 per cent of something in nonrenewable resources is that we have to begin to deal with – as I say, we know about affordable housing coming up. We know about green and sustainable energy, the infrastructure deficit, and all the rest of it. I think we have to look at that on a year-by-year basis because if the economy, the overheated economy, keeps going as fast as it is, I'm not sure we can play catch-up, but we have to do something. That's why taking an arbitrary number all the time on a year-by-year basis doesn't make a lot of sense. So I generally agree with the idea that where we can, we should put some money in the heritage trust fund for the future.

Now, the other particular problem. Again, I understand the purpose that the member is talking about in terms of the tax refunds, as he calls them, but I think there is a danger here, Mr. Speaker. I'm told that with the Alaska equivalent of our heritage trust fund, where they automatically gave out money to the taxpayers, now when that fund is going down, people expect to get the same amount even though the same amount of money is not coming in. So it's created a real political problem. It's almost a sense of entitlement now even though it was meant that there would be a certain percentage that would go back to the people in terms of, again, a tax refund. As the amount of money coming is going down, people are still expecting the same amount. So they see it as a permanent sort of situation, and I think we create sort of a sense of entitlement by doing that that we may not be able to keep up in the future, but people don't understand that. I worry about that. I'd rather look to more, if you like, tax reductions, especially for the working poor and the people in the lower income. I think that's what we have to be mainly concerned about.

Again, I reiterate: if we want to really give something that's permanent and sustainable, it's the tax reductions on our medicare premiums. Now, I know that the government doesn't call these taxes, but they are. They are, in fact, taxes. That would be \$900 million, a lot of money, admittedly, out of the provincial revenues, but I think we could sustain that over a long period of time. That tax would be directed to the people that most need it, getting rid of our medicare premiums, Mr. Speaker. Frankly, with the refund, contrary to what the Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar says, the last people that need tax relief is the corporate sector and the well-to-do in this province. They are the last people. If we do a total, if you like, tax reduction to everybody, people that don't need it are going to get it. It's like a flat tax. If we're going to do it, a flat tax helps the people at the top more than it does the people at the bottom.

I worry about this for that particular reason, Mr. Speaker. We need to look at a couple of things. We have to look at our three

deficits, and I know that they're going to be trying to grapple with this in the budget. There's also the social deficit. We know what's happening in education, health care, the rest of it with the overheated economy, picking up the pieces from the mid-90s. On the infrastructure deficit we've had much discussion. I think a lot of the budget will probably have to deal with that. That's why it seems to me that in the short run to say that you're going to always put so much into the heritage trust fund – until you've caught up with these other deficits, it doesn't make much sense because you're doing it on nonrenewable resources. We have to do this year by year.

I also think that the tax reductions that we need are the ones that are sustainable over a long period of time. As I said, I think the medicare premiums are the first that we should be doing. Admittedly, \$900 million is a lot of money, but that would be directed to people that need it. The hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner mentioned raising the tax exemption. I think that probably makes some sense if it gets to more people, the working poor and then the people that can't afford housing right now with the rents rising and the rest of it. That's who we have to be concerned about, Mr. Speaker. In an overheated economy to say that we need tax reductions or tax relief for the corporate sector and the well-to-do in this society makes absolutely no sense at all. When you take a broad brush across, that's who a lot of it will go to.

So, Mr. Speaker, for that reason I again commend the member for at least bringing forward the big debate about where we should be going. I certainly understand the reasons that he's bringing forward, but I think it could create more problems than it solves in the long run.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

5:30

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Leduc-Beaumont-Devon.

Mr. Rogers: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm very pleased to join the debate on Motion 504 regarding the allocation of any Alberta surpluses. I'd like to thank the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner for sharing his idea on distributing provincial surpluses. As part of an open and transparent government I certainly welcome these important debates on how to approach our fiscal situation.

Motion 504, as stated, calls for 50 per cent of the budget surplus to be deposited into the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and the remaining 50 per cent to be distributed to Albertans as a percentage of their personal income and/or property taxes. Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that there are a few flaws in this rather simplistic equation. The one I'd like to mention: as proposed, I can't imagine that Albertans would stand to have their property taxes, for example, going up and down like yo-yos.

Mr. Speaker, Alberta has the lowest income tax level in Canada. It might surprise this member that the majority of the province's surplus revenues are not as a result of taxes. If Alberta's surplus was related to income tax collection, the surplus would be highly predictable; therefore, it would be much easier to abide by the kind of strategy that the member is asking for in Motion 504. The fact of the matter is that Alberta's economy is strengthened by our industries and natural resources while it is supplemented by Albertans' income and property tax contributions.

Alberta's economy is driven by the oil and gas sector, and this industry works with nonrenewable resources. Because of the volatile nature of the value of this commodity prices of oil and gas fluctuate with many factors, such as global conflict, foreign markets, and of course weather patterns. Because much of Alberta's economy is stimulated by the energy sector, surpluses are also linked

to the price of our dominant exploration commodity. As has been illustrated over the years, even with strong management the surplus is and always will be unpredictable.

Mr. Speaker, because of the varying streams of resource income in the province, it would not be wise to govern by the plan that's called for in this motion. Although Motion 504 provides an arena for debate, I believe that that's pretty much where its practicality ends. I urge all members of this Assembly to think long and hard about the source and volatility of Alberta's surpluses before even contemplating support for this motion.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others? The hon. Member for Edmonton-Ellerslie, followed by the hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Mr. Agnihotri: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise again and speak to Motion 504, sponsored by the Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. I appreciate that the member at least took the initiative. If we go back to 2004, there was no party that had a policy on revenue or a surplus policy. It was the Alberta Liberal Party who came up with the surplus and revenue policy.

It's very important to discuss in this House the surplus and revenue policy, which was also discussed by some members of the PC Party during the leadership contest. They indicated, you know, especially the Premier – the Minister of Sustainable Resource Development during his campaign was talking about 30 per cent of the resource revenue. Jim Dinning, a failed PC leadership contender, and those approximately 40 Tory MLAs – he mentioned that there should be, I think, 30 per cent during normal times and 50 per cent during boom times. You know, all these Tory leadership contenders started talking about surplus and revenue policies after the Alberta Liberal Party introduced their surplus policy.

Let me read this statement from the Premier's director of communication nowadays – he was a journalist before – Paul Stanway. He mentioned that the Grits are proposing boosting the heritage trust fund to \$120 billion over the next . . .

An Hon. Member: How much?

Mr. Agnihotri: A hundred and twenty billion dollars.

Our policies I will talk on very briefly after this. He said when he was a journalist that the Grits are proposing boosting the heritage trust fund to \$120 billion over the next 15 years, so when the oil and gas money runs out, the province can use interest from the fund to replace nonrenewable energy revenue; it's simple, it's achievable, and it's likely the prescription for the future most Albertans want. This is a statement from today's Premier's director of communications. It indicates that the majority of the media and a majority of the politicians in Alberta, that includes the former Premier, indicated that the Alberta Liberal Party had a better surplus policy.

I actually commend the hon. member. At least he tried to come up with some ideas. Something is better than nothing. But our policies were commended by the media and some of the Tory top guns, including a former Premier. I think that this Motion 504, compared to whatever we had in the year 2004 election campaign, is not even close. That's the reason I can't support this motion, you know, the rationale.

The Alberta Liberal caucus has a fiscal policy. It's not like Motion 504. In addition to the Alberta Liberal caucus policy, that invests 30 per cent off the top, any year-end surplus will go directly to the heritage fund. Through building the heritage fund, Albertans will be in a position to permanently enjoy competitive taxes.

Here is how the Alberta Liberal caucus policy invests in Alberta's future. An Alberta Liberal government would immediately invest 30

per cent of annual nonrenewable resource revenue as follows: 35 per cent to the heritage fund, 35 per cent to the postsecondary endowment fund, 25 per cent to erase Alberta's infrastructure debt. Once that is accomplished, this 25 per cent will be funnelled to the heritage fund. Five per cent will go into a humanities, social sciences, arts endowment fund to an upper limit of \$500 million. Once this cap is reached, 5 per cent will be used to create an opportunity fund, a flexible saving account designed to meet whatever priorities future Albertans assign it. In addition to a 30 per cent off-the-top savings, any year-end surplus will go directly to the heritage fund.

5:40

So if the Alberta Liberal Party had this policy 15 years ago – just 15 years ago – according to the economists, according to some of the media we would have at least a savings of \$120 billion. So \$6 billion of interest would have come out of those savings, and we could have used that \$6 billion in the general revenue. If we had that plan 15 years ago, we would have the best universities in the world, the best hospitals everywhere in Alberta. Child care policies, all that, the problems that we are socially facing: we wouldn't have those problems if we had proper policies like we have.

But, unfortunately, this PC government, they never had a policy so far. Even the former Premier admitted himself that he was not expecting a boom, certainly, and they never had a policy and no plan. I think that's the reason, after spending 93 per cent of the resources, we are nowhere. We already spent 93 per cent of the resource revenue, and still if you ask anybody, they will say that we need tons of money in the infrastructure; we need money in the hospitals, education, and child care; and we need some money for the environment. If we include that money which we need, we are still in the red. We are still in the red, you know, because . . . [interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Agnihotri: My point is, Mr. Speaker, that if we are not doing good, it is because of the bad planning or without planning of this government. I'm glad at least they have started thinking about planning on the surplus and the revenue base.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Member for Calgary-Bow.

Ms DeLong: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I'm pleased to rise today and join in the discussion of Motion 504 put forward by the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner. The motion urges the government to invest 50 per cent of the budget surplus into the Alberta heritage savings trust fund and distribute the remaining portion to Albertans as personal and property tax credits.

The motion does not provide enough direction and clarity for something as complex as Alberta's financial well-being. It's the government's role to wisely invest our revenue for the good of all Albertans, but this proposal fails to live up to the revenue objectives that the government is already pursuing. For example, the Alberta heritage trust fund is a valuable asset that should continue to receive sufficient funds to allow future Albertans to benefit from its fiscal potential. For over 30 years it has supported ongoing government initiatives to sustain and improve Alberta's fiscal position.

But the member's proposal neglects many of the other important funds that are administered by the province. Now, these investments include investing in education. The access to the future fund, which invests surplus revenues in endowments for innovations in the

postsecondary system, is currently standing at \$1 billion. Investing in technology. The Alberta ingenuity fund, supplemented by the Access to the Future Act, harnesses Alberta's vast research potential in everything from agriculture to nanotechnology. It operates as a trust fund and is generating income from the principal, which is currently valued at over \$700 million, and investing in health over the next three years. A total of \$2.7 billion will be provided to not only increase the assets of the heritage fund and the medical research endowment fund and the just-established Alberta cancer prevention legacy fund.

Mr. Speaker, the heritage fund is valuable, but so, too, are other investments and financial obligations. Myself, I am very much in favour of saving, and I do believe that all of the money that we spend belongs to the people of Alberta. But new Albertans, when they have been coming to Alberta since the 1800s, one of the first things that they as a community work towards are schools. The hundreds of thousands of people that are coming to Alberta need schools, and they need schools where they live, or at least somewhat close to where they live. This is a basic government responsibility, to make sure that we have the schools where we need them. This is an added pressure that comes onto a growing economy like we have here in Alberta. One of the basic responsibilities that we have as a government is to catch up on these schools for all of these people that are coming to Alberta.

The same thing for hospitals, and the same thing for roads. Just because, you know, people come, they haven't brought their roads with them. But they do bring their cars, or they get here and they find the prosperity to be able to buy the cars. To be able to get from one place to another, they've got to have sufficient roads. So it's just much too simplistic a way of looking at our responsibilities.

The motion's intent, I mean, sort of vacillates between the extremes, and it doesn't provide enough detail on the focus of the motion. So due to this simplistic approach, which ignores the government responsibilities to a growing populace, I'm afraid that I cannot support it. I believe that working within our current fiscal framework and fine-tuning Alberta's financial policy is the most appropriate approach to addressing Alberta's budget surpluses. I encourage the hon. member to await the budget to be released in coming days, which will include a formula for the management of resource revenues, among many other details.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there others that wish to participate in the debate?

Does the hon. Member for Cardston-Taber-Warner wish to close debate?

Mr. Hinman: I certainly do, Mr. Speaker. I rise again to close the debate on Motion 504, and I thank the hon. members that have taken part. I guess I'll start with the hon. Member for Cypress-Medicine Hat and the research people from the government that prepared the paper to speak on that. First, I must say that I'm disappointed in the fact that most people haven't read the motion closely enough to realize that this is about surplus dollars, not about budget dollars. There's a huge difference. This is about saving surplus dollars, and this is about a refund to the actual taxpayers of the province for the hard-earned money. They know how to spend it better than the government does. Always the people know better than the government how to spend it. When we take the attitude that government knows best, we're in trouble.

I was disappointed with the comment, first of all, that it is too simple. Simplicity is always the best. There's no need to make it complex. That's just to take people out of the debate.

To further look at the situation, the heritage trust fund, if it was really to be one, should be around \$200 billion, like Norway's. If we want it to be able to replace the income – that's at a 6 per cent return on investment – that's coming in from our natural resources, then that should be the goal. We should have legislation to save 10 per cent of the actual income from the resource revenue. I'm not talking about the surplus dollars.

But this government is clear in its message that it knows how to spend the money better than the people who have earned it. It's interesting how they go to other institutions and think tanks rather than the people to see what they would like to do with it.

Once again, the hon. Member for Edmonton-Gold Bar talked about an open government. It's interesting that this government in its own AGM is going to limit the discussion to five resolutions. I know that there are constituents that want to bring this resolution forward. [interjections]

5:50

The Deputy Speaker: Please, hon. members.

Mr. Hinman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

For the Member for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview in describing his worry about entitlement, this isn't anything more than a refund when there are surplus dollars. What the real concern is is that we have a province with so many programs that they think those programs are their entitlement rather than their benefits, so we need to look at this.

I talked to a lot of small businesses in small towns and in Calgary and Edmonton. The taxes are onerous. Many of them have to shut down and move to jurisdictions that have reduced taxes because they can't make a go of it anymore. We need to look at it. When the taxes go up for business, whether that's the grocery store or the hardware store, especially in a small town, they're only turned around to the people in that small town who come to purchase there.

Once again, this is not a complex issue; it's a simple one. This government itself had a simple legislation, that any surplus dollars that came in were to pay down the debt. Had they stuck with that

and put it into savings, we would truly be better off today, instead of frivolously spending it and following what Alexander Tytler says about the doom of democracy, that a government is bound on buying votes by providing programs from the public treasury to bring in those votes. Like I say, whether that's rural against urban or north against south, it's not in the best interest of the people to raise taxes and to spend surplus dollars frivolously.

What we need to do is focus on the family. The point of this motion was to focus on the family, to focus on the community, and that was to return the dollars to where they're generated, and that's from the people, the workers of Alberta, and also from the communities and their property taxes. By putting that money back – economists have taught for years that if you want to increase and boost the economy, you lower taxes. If you want to slow down something, for example, our driving in Alberta, you raise the gas tax. If you want to have a boost, you look at that, and you lower the taxes. Whether that's on such things as windmills or geothermal heating, there are many things that we can and should reduce the taxes on, but that's another debate for another day. I'm sure we'll have it this Thursday because we'll see an increase, not a reduction, in taxes.

Once again, I would urge all members to think a little longer, to read a little harder, and realize that this is about the people of Alberta, not the government and its ability to spend its money foolishly, those hard-earned dollars of the people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Motion Other than Government Motion 504 lost]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. Deputy Government House Leader.

Mr. Stevens: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We had good debate today. I think it would be appropriate to call it 6 o'clock and adjourn until 1 o'clock tomorrow afternoon.

[Motion carried; at 5:54 p.m. the Assembly adjourned to Tuesday at 1 p.m.]